

Tips for Reading Quickly and Analytically

1. How to find the argument:
 - a. Read the first few paragraphs (or pages) to figure out where in the paragraph the author places their important information. The first place to check is the topic sentence of each paragraph, as well as the last sentence of each paragraph. But, remember that not all authors put their important information in the same places!
 - b. Then, skim the rest of the article/book/etc. by reading only those places. So, if the author puts the important information in the first sentence or the last sentence, read only that. The rest will be details. Read the details if you're interested, or if you think they'll help you understand the piece better.
 - i. Note: The quickest way to analytically skim a book is to read the introduction and conclusion, as well as the first and last few pages of each chapter. If you have more time, then follow the rest of the formula above.
2. Other things to look for:
 - a. Types of Sources the Author is Using: Are they newspapers? Diaries? Government Documents? How do these sources shape the narrative the author tells? What do they leave out?
 - b. Intervention in the Scholarly Literature: What other historians are the author in conversation with? How does this author's argument fit with what other scholars have written?
3. Don't be afraid to write on what you're reading! Underline it, highlight it, write comments to the side. All of this will help you remember what you've read and will make going back through it easier. (I suggest doing this whether you've printed the reading or if you're reading it on your computer/iPad/etc.).