

Strategies for Reading New Texts

Don't forget to consult your syllabus if you are unsure how closely you should read a text. Reading for understanding can be faster than reading for synthesis in a paper later.

Why are you reading?	What should you prioritize?
For my own interest	Look up words you don't know! Take your time, read what you want/can, enjoy!
For class discussion	Write down questions you have. Be able to relate to the class itself. Make sure to scan headings and read the most important sections first.
To use as a source in a paper	Read the abstract first, look up vocabulary you don't know. Pull quotes as you read, make sure to note page numbers.
To learn and retain key content	Summarize key points. Consider the citations the author is using as evidence-- if you need to read those sources do so! Take note if you disagree.

Library Tip: Looking things up as you read is a part of the research you do as a scholar. Here are some library resources in CLIO to use as you read:

Oxford Bibliographies: Get an introduction to most topics quickly. Especially good for humanities topics.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED): Look up words you don't know.

Gale Virtual Reference: Excellent encyclopedia for all subjects. Bonus for Topic finder tool.

Sage Research Methods: Learn about quantitative and qualitative methods. Podcasts and video content included.

Feeling anxious about a reading? These are three steps to help you work through any text.

- Have you read this author before?
- Yes!** Is there something they are famous for? Jog your memory!
 - No!** Google or look them up in Wikipedia. Knowing the author's context will help you make sense of their argument and biases. What is their affiliation or occupation?
- Do you know the words in the title and abstract?
- Yes!** Scan the headings of the article. Which headings should you prioritize? Highlight or circle words you don't know as you go to look up.
 - No!** Look those up first, they will come up again throughout the text.
- Will you be taking notes by hand?
- Yes!** Make sure to keep your notes safe! Consider taking a picture or scanning these to have a back up copy.
 - No!** Having notes digitally makes it easy to transfer for paper writing later. Just make sure to keep track of page numbers for citation later.

Context about the text you are reading helps you fill in gaps:

When was this article published? What academic discipline best describes their work? Is the author affiliated with an academic institution or does their work give them authority on the topic?

A reading plan can help you from feeling overwhelmed:

Which sections will you read first? If there is an abstract read that first, you may NOT want to keep reading. Often reading the literature review first can help because it provides context.

Library Tip: Note taking style is personal, but the practice is very important to reading. There are many types of taking notes, but the important thing is to save these notes in a place you can find them.

The source evaluation process begins as soon as the information gathering process begins. No information is bias free-- you should start evaluation before you do a complete reading. The following chart is adapted from Notre Dame's De Namur University's research guide "Selecting and Evaluating Sources" (2020).

Information Need	Where to find it	Evaluation
General Information	Nonfiction books, reference books/encyclopedias or reference/encyclopedia databases or web pages	<i>Does the publisher hire diverse writers?</i>
Academic, Peer-reviewed, Scholarly	Academic books, scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles (which are in databases).	<i>Does the author acknowledge gaps or bias?</i>
Breaking News	Web pages or social media sites. Magazines or newspapers in CLIO.	<i>Is the reporter on the ground?</i>
Facts and Statistics	Handbooks, yearbooks, or almanacs (print or from databases or online) and U.S. government information available on the web and in CLIO.	<i>When was the material published? Facts change.</i>
Historical information	Nonfiction books, reference books, encyclopedias, & online archives.	<i>How does colonialism factor in?</i>
Maps, Images, Charts	Almanacs/reference books (print or from databases), & Geospatial datasets.	<i>How has it changed over time?</i>
Opinions	Magazine and newspaper articles (print or from databases) or online	<i>Does the author acknowledge gaps or bias?</i>

During source gathering determine the general purpose of your source

- Do you need to evaluate the source as part of your research? Find an object source as the site of analysis.
- Do you need information to determine the validity of your own arguments? Find a context source to frame the object source.
- Do you need a point of view to add depth to your argument? Find a critical source to offer [critical] commentary on the object source.
- Want to use theories or conceptual frameworks to validate their use in academia? Find a theory to apply to the object source.

On the next page there are six different note taking systems. Some work better for note taking by hand versus on a computer, but all will help you keep track of your readings.

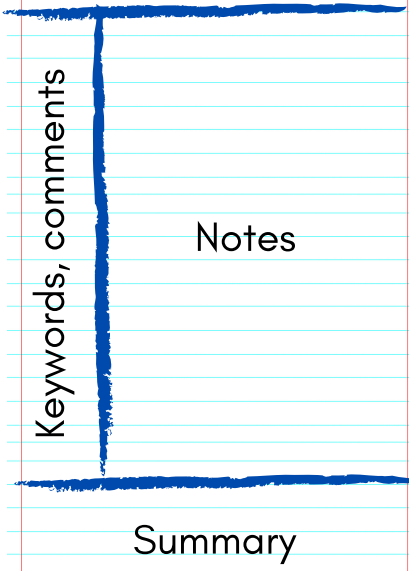
Structure: Outline

Provides a guide for a future product, like a paper. Before writing, use the visual structure to demonstrate hierarchies and relationships between ideas within your future paper.

- I. Introduction
 - A. Hook
 - B. Background Information
 - C. Thesis
 - D. Transition
- II. Body Paragraph One
 - A. Main point one
 - i. Supporting detail one
 - ii. Supporting detail two
 - B. Main point two
 - i. Supporting detail one
 - ii. Supporting detail two
 - C. Transition
- III. Body Paragraph Two
- IV. Body Paragraph Three
- V. Body Paragraph Four
- VI. Conclusion
 - A. Transition
 - B. Restate Thesis
 - C. Review main points
 - D. Final Thought/ So What?

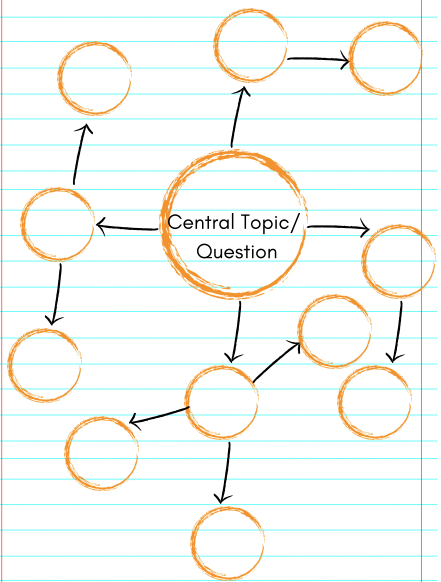
Review: Cornell Notes

Provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes without recopying. After writing the notes in the main space, use the left-hand space to label each idea and detail with a key word or "cue." Save space for a summary at the bottom of the page.



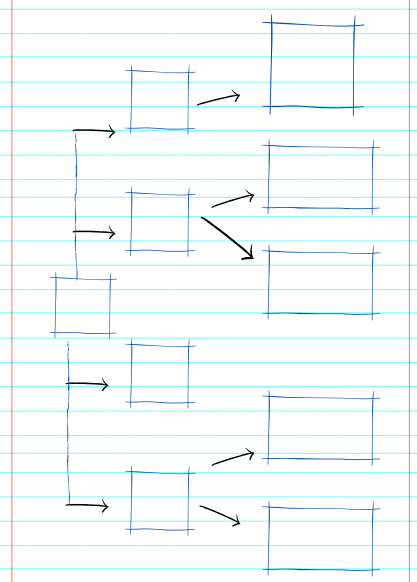
Depth: Mind Maps/ Webs

Provides a creative strategy for tracking general overviews of a topic by showing hierarchies, relationships and connections between ideas. Make notes using either sentences or keywords.



Holistic: Flow Charts

Provides a way to simplify, visualize, and establish connections between ideas within and outside of a lecture. While writing, arrange information spatially and show connections with arrows or lines.



Visual: Bullet Journal Notes

Provides a visual representation of one's thought process. Use your time to combine different note-taking styles, arrange your page, and organize all necessary information into something tailored for you.

Subject
Date

Vocabulary/ Key Terms

- I. Main Point One
 - A. Key Detail One
 - B. Key Detail Two
- II. Main Point Two
 - A. Key Detail One
 - B. Key Detail Two
- III. Main Point Three
 - A. Key Detail One
 - B. Key Detail Two

Next Steps:
To
Review Further

Summary of Outcomes

Relational: Charting Method

Provides a way to condense large amounts of facts. Set up your paper by drawing columns and labeling appropriate headings in a table based on topical categories to be covered in a lecture.

Event	Date	People	Outcomes				

Writing about what you have read can be difficult. Here are some prompts to consider as part of your analysis.

Bias

- Does the author address gaps?
- Is there anything that indicates the author received funding from a company, think tank, or other source that might influence the text?
- Does the author's affiliation with a university, non-profit, or other organization affect the text in any way?
- Does the information provided feel complete or like it only provides a limited view of a subject? If so, why?
- Is the topic quickly changing or evolving? Is the information likely still relevant, or is it based on knowledge or assumptions that are now outdated?

Evaluations

- Do you agree with the results or conclusions? Why?
- What is the theory or method discussed?
- How does the publication contribute to your understanding of the topic?
- What are its key insights and arguments?
- Does the reference list have sources from one time period or spread out across a certain timeline relevant to the field?

Comparing texts to one another

- Does the text refer to iconic texts/studies? Or rely on secondary literature?
- Is there a pattern emerging?
- Does the research use established frameworks or take an innovative approach?
- Debates, conflicts and contradictions: where do sources disagree?

If you need more assistance with writing don't forget about the Writing Center. The Library has a book called "How Scholars Write" by Aaron Ritzenberg and Sue Mendelsohn (2021) found here in CLIO: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14565057>

Library Tip: Don't forget that reading and synthesizing take time. Plan for breaks and rest!