

TIPS FOR READING*

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Abstract

This module contains suggestions for how to read a variety of texts generally, with special emphasis on issues of authorship, ownership and the historical and legal context.

1 Some tips for reading...

Rule 1: Leave yourself time.

The most important rule for actually getting something out of the reading is to leave yourself time not only to read the text, but to think about it, and to ask questions about it. Plan ahead, budget a couple of hours, and if only takes 30 minutes to read, use the rest of the time to consider the text, to reread parts, to pose questions, or to compare it with other texts.

Rule 2: Take Notes.

There are many styles of taking notes. Some people copy down quotations in order to remember them, some people make maps or hierarchies, some people write their own thoughts about what they've read. Notes should serve two purposes: they should allow you to remember what you read without having to re-read the whole thing, and they should serve as a basis for discussion in class and for your own writing. Figure out for yourself how to achieve this. Bring your notes and the text to class for discussion, so that you can add to them or annotate them during discussion.

Rule 3: Know what you are reading.

Do not just start. In this class (Anth 321/Clas 311) there are a lot of different kinds of texts, and we will read them both for what they say and examples of forms of authorship and ownership. This requires a zen-like attitude in which you read a text and think about it at the same time. Do not simply pass your eyes over the text and pronounce it read, but sit down before the text and answer some preliminary questions; figure out what it is, why we're reading it, then read it. Always familiarize yourself with the text before you begin. If it's not clear what it is, ask one of the instructors or use a trusty friend: the library. Try to answer these questions before you begin:

- What era is it from? What year?
- Does it have an author? multiple authors? An institution as the author? An editor? A translator? A commentator? Is it a letter, is it written for a particular person? A particular audience?
- Where was it written? Where was it published? If it's online, where did it come from? Who put it online and why?

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- Are you reading an "original" version? Is it abridged, collected, adumbrated, interpolated, translated, edited? Are there other texts by the author? Other versions?
- What kind of work is it? Poetry, law, commentary on something else? scholarly study? History? Legal document? Official document?
- How long is the work? Are you reading a section of it? Do you know which section and why?

Rule 4: Make a time-line.

Go back to the question, "when was it written?" In this class we will read works that span some 2500 years. That's a lot of time. You won't be tested on dates and times, but if you make a mistake, it's likely you will be ridiculed, or at least publically corrected. These details are important—not in themselves—but so that you can keep track of other more general discussions.

- Make a time line for yourself. In fact, make several. Some issues will cluster around small time periods, others will be empty. Some issues might need to be on separate time lines (i.e. legal changes vs. technical ones).
- Use the timeline as an aid to memory, not as a way of making arguments. Chronology is important, but it isn't that important

Rule 5: Think about authorship and ownership

As we progress in the class, you will learn more about these issues, and will be presented with more and more texts meant to demonstrate different issues. Begin to ask yourself:

- What is the legal status of this text? Does it have an owner—is the owner different than the author(s)? What kind of property laws govern it?
- Is it an anomalous text? Does it stand out for some reason other than what it says?
- Is the author aware of the first two issues? Does the text refer to its own status as an object?
- Is the text "valuable" (whatever that might mean)? What makes it so?

Rule 6: Coordinate with other texts.

Do not read each text in isolation. Go back and forth between texts. The readings for this class have been carefully selected in order to produce surprising comparisons and connections. If you read each text in isolation and expect enlightenment, you will be disappointed, alone and confused. Do not lose faith, however, because there is always a party in your text, you just need to find it.

- Do the texts explicitly refer to each other? How?
- Do they implicitly refer? Is it assumed that you have read something else?
- Are there "intertextual" references? (remember your timeline, generally texts only refer in one temporal direction!) What is the nature of this reference?
- What are the "common" texts referred to? Are there things the author assumes "everyone knows"? What are they and do you know them? How can you find out what is "commonly known" vs. what is an obscure reference or inside joke?

NOTE: Paul Edward's *How to Read a Book*¹

¹<http://www.si.umich.edu/~pne/PDF/howtoread.pdf>