

Student Feature - Advice on Reading Smart

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/21/student-feature-advice-on-reading-smart/>

STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, DEC 21 2016

This is an adapted excerpt from *International Relations*. Download the book for free from E-International Relations.

Try to set aside time to read. You will need to put your devices on silent, close your internet browsers and find a quiet space to work. Take ten-minute mini-breaks every hour or so to do other things and make sure to eat a decent meal midway through your study session to give you a longer break. Finally, get a good night's sleep before and after you study. Your brain does not absorb or retain information very well when you are sleep deprived or hungry. There will be times in the year when panic sets in as deadlines approach, but if you have already developed a good reading strategy you will find you are in good shape for the task at hand.

Reading for scholarly purposes is not the same as reading for pleasure. You need to adopt a reading strategy. Everyone has their own way of doing this, but the basic tip is this: take notes as you read. If you find that you don't have many notes or your mind goes a little blank, then you might be reading too quickly or not paying enough attention. This is most likely if you are reading digitally on a computer or tablet, as it is very easy for the eyes to wander or for you to drift onto a social media site. If this happens, don't worry: just go back and start again. Often, reading something a second time is when it clicks.

Best practice is to make rough notes as you read through each source. When you get to the end of a chapter or section, compile your rough notes into a list of 'key points' that you would like to remember. This will be useful when you come to revise or recap an issue because you won't necessarily have to read the entire source again. Your notes should trigger your memory and remind you of the key information. Some textbooks do this for you and provide a list of key points at the end of each chapter. However, it's often better for you to ignore those and make your own summaries.

By making notes you will form a reading strategy that will allow you to retain the most important information and compress it into a smaller set of notes integral to revision for examinations and preparation for discussions and assignments. You should adopt this approach with everything you read during your studies. It's best to use digital means (laptop/tablet) so you can create backups and not risk losing valuable handwritten paper notes. You should also note down the citation information for each set of notes at the top of the page so that you can identify the source you took the notes from if you need to reference it later in any written work.

About the author:

Dr Stephen McGlinchey is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of E-International Relations and Senior Lecturer of International Relations at UWE Bristol. His publications include *Foundations of International Relations* (Bloomsbury 2022), *International Relations* (2017), *International Relations Theory* (2017) and *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (Routledge 2021, 2014). You can find him on twitter @mcglincheyst or LinkedIn.

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