New Course Request

Indiana University

Check Appropriate Boxes: Undergraduate credit ☑ Graduate credit ☐ Professional credit ☐

1. School/Division: Arts and Sciences
2. Academic Subject Code: HIST
3. Course Number: 3311 (must be cleared with University Enrollment Services)
4. Instructor: Ann Livshitz
5. Course Title: Holocaust and Modern Genocides

Recommended Abbreviation (Optional) (Limited to 32 Characters including spaces)

6. First time this course is to be offered (Semester/Year): Fall 2010
7. Credit Hours: Fixed at 3 _______ or Variable from _______ to _______
8. Is this course to be graded S-F (only)? Yes ☑ No ☐
9. Is variable title approval being requested? Yes ☑ No ☐
10. Course description (not to exceed 50 words) for Bulletin publication: This course examines genocide in the 20th century: first state-sponsored mass murder, systematic murder of Jews in Europe during World War II, regional differences in implementation of genocidal policies, memory and commemoration, the political uses and abuses of the Holocaust, Genocide Convention and the international community.
11. Lecture Contact Hours: Fixed at 3 _______ or Variable from _______ to _______
12. Non-Lecture Contact Hours: Fixed at 0 _______ or Variable from _______ to _______
13. Estimated enrollment: 30 _______ of which 0 _______ percent are expected to be graduate students.
14. Frequency of scheduling: Once a year ☑ Will this course be required for majors? ☐
15. Justification for new course: I would like to focus primarily on the 20th century with a research paper component (300-level). The 300-level course currently on the books focuses on the Holocaust, while I would like to include post-World War II genocides as well.
16. Are the necessary reading materials currently available in the appropriate library? Yes ☑ No ☐
17. Please append a complete outline of the proposed course, and indicate instructor (if known), textbooks, and other materials.

18. If this course overlaps with existing courses, please explain with which courses it overlaps and whether this overlap is necessary, desirable, or unimportant

19. A copy of every new course proposal must be submitted to departments, schools, or divisions in which there may be overlap of the new course with existing courses or areas of strong concern, with instructions that they send comments directly to the originating Curriculum Committee. Please append a list of departments, schools, or divisions thus consulted.

Submitted by: [Signature] Date: 9/3/00

Date Department Chairman/Division Director

Dean of Graduate School (when required)

Approved by: [Signature] Date: 10/4/89

Dean

Chancellor/Vice-President

University Enrollment Services

After School/Division approval, forward the last copy (without attachments) to University Enrollment Services for initial processing, and the remaining four copies and attachments to the Campus Chancellor or Vice-President.
History B3XX: Holocaust and Modern Genocides
Proposed Teaching Time: Fall 2010

Course Description
This course examines the phenomenon of mass murder and the concept of genocide in the 20th century. It
starts with the examination of the first state-sponsored mass murder in the Ottoman Empire during World
War I. It then examines systematic murder of Jews in Europe during the World War II, looking at such
topics as modern anti-semitism, racial politics, the relationship between mass murder and war, issues of
 collaboration and resistance, and exploring regional differences in implementation of genocidal policies.
We will look at the process of trying to understand the Holocaust, the problem of memory and
commemoration, and the political uses and abuses of the Holocaust. Finally, we will analyze post-World
War II cases of genocidal violence around the world, looking at the impact of the creation of the term
"genocide," the establishment of the Genocide Convention, and the role of the international community.

Grading:
• Attendance, discussion participation, quizzes and in-class presentation(s) (15%)
  Attendance is important, but active participation—asking and answering questions—is what is required
  and expected. (See additional handouts on Blackboard)
• Midterm (take home) (15%)
• Final Exam (20%)
• Writing Assignments (50%)
  Primary Document Analysis
  Analysis of Two Primary Documents
  Research Paper

Warning: This syllabus is equivalent to a contract between the professor and the student. You are
responsible for fully understanding the contents of this document. Please let me know if you have any
questions about items on this syllabus.

Expectations

Academic cheating or plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course and the appropriate
disciplinary action as outlined in the University’s statement on academic honesty. Plagiarism is defined as
"Using intellectual property or product of someone else without giving proper credit.” There will be a
handout on plagiarism and proper citation format for your writing assignments. If you have any questions
or doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly credit your sources, you should talk to the
instructor before you turn in your writing assignment. Plagiarism will not be tolerated at any stage of
course work (including rough drafts).

Students are expected to regularly check their IUPUI email accounts for breaking news about genocides,
updates to the course schedule, extra credit opportunities and other administrative issues. Students should
be able to access course materials available through Blackboard and ReservesExpress.

Attendance and class participation are required. Missing class and not taking part in the discussion of the
assigned readings negatively affects your attendance and participation grade. Additionally, for each three
unexcused absences your final grade for the course will be lowered by half a letter grade (for example,
from an A- to a B+). If you miss class, you are still responsible for the material covered, so you should
go to the lecture outline from Blackboard, contact someone who attended, and talk to me if you have any
additional questions.
Students are expected to come to class prepared—able to take part in the discussion of the reading assignment and ready to take a short quiz on the reading assignment (or lecture material). (See Blackboard for a handout on how to prepare for class.)

Students are expected to regularly read at least one daily newspaper or weekly journal that covers international events and be aware of the current situation in the world, particularly as it pertains to mass violence and human rights violations.

Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of CASA (Center for Academic Support and Advancement) (KT G21) and the Writing Center (KT G19). Students may be required to work with a Writing Tutor depending on the quality of their first writing assignment.

If you have a disability and need assistance, special arrangements can be made to accommodate most needs. Contact the Director of Services for Students with Disabilities (Walb Union, Room 113, telephone number 481-6658) as soon as possible to work out the details. Once the director has provided you with a letter attesting to your needs for modification, bring the letter to me. For more information, please visit the web site for SSD at http://www.ipfw.edu/ssd

Contacting me:
It is the student’s responsibility to contact the professor if there are any problems, so that the problems can be resolved in a timely manner. If you have any questions about the course, you should not hesitate to contact the professor.

When contacting me, please use my regular email address livschia@ipfw.edu (not Blackboard).

While I strongly encourage you to contact me with any questions or concerns you have about the course, please keep in mind that an email sent to your professor should be treated as formal business correspondence and written as such. Your email should begin with a proper salutation (e.g. Hello, Professor Livschiz/Hellos, Dr. Livschiz/etc.). Emails that begin with “Hey” (or any variation on that) will be disregarded. Your emails should be written in complete sentences and free of typos and grammatical mistakes.

Readings
The following books are available for purchase the University bookstore:

J. Gross, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland

C. Browning, Ordinary Men

S. Power, “A Problem from Hell" America and the Age of Genocide

P. Levi, Survival in Auschwitz

A. Spiegelman, Maus: A Survivor’s Tale

M. L. Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History (this book is also used in H217)

Strunk&White, Elements of Style (any edition) [strongly suggested]

Other required readings are available through ReservesEXpress at Helmke library and through Blackboard. There will also be occasional handouts (maps, statistics, etc.) in class.
A VERY IMPORTANT NOTE ON THE SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER:

The dates for the midterm and final exam and due dates for all the writing assignments are outlined on the syllabus. It is your responsibility to keep track of these dates and turn in your writing assignments on time in class and not electronically. For every day an assignment is late, the grade is reduced by half a letter grade (e. g. from an A- to a B+). No late work will be accepted once the graded assignments have been returned to the rest of the class.

Due dates for reading assignments may be adjusted based on class pace in order to ensure flexibility for maximizing student learning. The changes will be announced in class. You should use the syllabus as a guide for the order in which the topics will be covered.

Please note that changes in the reading assignment schedule do not affect the due dates for the writing assignments.

If any problems arise that will prevent you from turning in your work on time, you should discuss the problem with me ASAP.
SCHEDULE

1. **Wednesday, August 25**: Introduction: Modernity and Exterminatory Practices

2. **Friday, August 27**: Ottoman Empire and the Armenian “Problem”
   Reading: Power, Chapter 1; “Armenian Genocide Reader” (*a few primary documents available on Blackboard*)

3. **Wednesday, September 1**: Modern Anti-Semitism: Defining the Jewish Question
   Reading: Relevant chapter from W. Lacquer, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*

4. **Friday, September 3**: National Socialism and Racial Politics in Germany: Eugenics, Euthanasia and Anti-Semitism
   Reading: S. Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (selections)

5. **Wednesday, September 8**: World War II and the Invasion of Poland: The Road to the Final Solution
   Reading: C. Browning, *Ordinary Men*

6. **Friday, September 10**: The Final Solution: Designing the Camps
   Reading: “Wannsee Conference Minutes”; Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (selections)
   ***WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE***

7. **and 8. Wednesday, September 15 and Friday, September 17**: “Jewish Question” in Western Europe (select case studies: Denmark, Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, France)
   Reading: R. Weisberg, *Vichy Law and the Holocaust in France* (selections)

9. **and 10. Wednesday, September 22 and Friday, September 24**: “Jewish Question” in the Soviet Union (regional variations: Ukraine, Belorussia, Baltic Republics)
   Reading: Primary Documents dealing with Nazi policy in the Soviet Union, Soviet eyewitness accounts

11. **Wednesday, September 29**: Life and Death in the Ghettos
    Reading: *Words to Outlive Us: Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto* (selections)
    ***WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE***

12. **Friday, October 1**: Life and Death in the Camps
    Reading: P. Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

13. **Wednesday, October 6**: Jews in Forests
    Reading: Primary documents: materials from Soviet archives on Jewish participation in the partisan units

14. **Friday, October 8**: Holocaust and International Politics Jews in Forests
    ***MIDTERM DUE IN CLASS***

15. **Wednesday, October 13**: Liberation and Allied Discoveries
    Assignment: Footage of liberation of the death camps
16. Friday, October 15: Quest for Justice: The Nuremberg Trials
   **Reading:** *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-46: A Documentary History*, ed. M. Marrus
   (selections)

17. Wednesday, October 20: Holocaust in Postwar European Politics: France
   **Reading:** Selections by M. Marrus and R. Paxton

18. Friday, October 22: Holocaust in Postwar European Politics: Soviet Union and Poland

19. Wednesday, October 27: Quest for Understanding: Perpetrators
   **Reading:** J. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*

20. Friday, October 29: Quest for Understanding: Scholarship on the Holocaust
   **Reading:** *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (selections)

21-22. Wednesday, November 3 and Friday November 5: Politics of Memory: Survivors Speak and Write
   **Reading:** T. Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*; recording of Eva Kor’s lecture at IPFW *(Eva Kor is a survivor of Mendele’s medical experiments on twins in Auschwitz who lives in Indiana)*

23. Wednesday, November 10: To Name the Crime: Raphael Lemkin
   **Reading:** Power, chapters 2-4

24. Friday, November 12: Genocide Convention and the Problem of Terminology: Can the Term Be Used Retroactively?
   **Reading:** Power, chapters 5, 7

25. Wednesday, November 17: Applying the Convention and Cold War Politics: Cambodia and Iraq
   **Reading:** Power, chapter 6, 8

26. Friday, November 19: Applying the Convention: Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda
   **Reading:** Power, chapters 9-12

27. Wednesday, December 1: Holocaust Commemoration: Search for Meaning
   **Assignment:** Web-resources for United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Auschwitz, Terezin

28. Friday, December 3: Holocaust Denial
   **Reading:** D. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (selections)

29. Wednesday, December 8: Teaching the Holocaust
   **Reading:** Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*

   **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9: FINAL PAPER DUE**

30. Friday, December 10: Contemporary Genocide and Political Use of the Holocaust
   **Reading:** Power, conclusion + materials from current press
History B3XX
Writing Assignment 1: Primary Source Analysis
DUE: Friday, September 10

For the first writing assignment, you are asked to write a 3 page paper (double-spaced, Times font 12), analyzing the following document: Mary Caffey, “Caravans of Death” (available on Blackboard).

Some questions to consider for this assignment:
--Who is the author?
--Who is the intended audience?
--What is the document about?
--Why is the author writing this piece?
  What is the author's goal?
  What the author does in the piece to convey his message?
  --use of style, language/language choices, rhetorical devices, arguments
--How does this document add to our understanding of the topic under consideration?

(Note: your paper should not be simply a response to these questions.)

Some suggestions (with apologies if you already know this):
1. Your paper should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
   Your paper is also not an exploration of your feelings and emotions about the document under consideration. You should avoid phrases like “I feel,” “I like,” etc. Your focus is the document. It does not mean that you don’t get to have opinions about the document or strong feelings about it. You must simply learn to express those opinions in an appropriate style and language.

2. Your introduction must include a thesis statement. Some clarification on what a thesis is (borrowed from M. L. Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 5th ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 47-49):
   “A thesis is not a description of your paper topic, a question, a statement of fact, or a statement of opinion.”
   “A thesis is a statement that reflects what you have concluded about the topic of your paper, based on critical analysis and interpretation” of the document you are analyzing.
   “The thesis usually arises from the questions you pose of the text […] as you engage in active reading.”
   “[A] thesis is always an arguable point, a conclusion with which a thoughtful reader might disagree. It is the writer’s job, in the body of the paper, to provide an argument based on evidence that will convince the reader that his or her thesis is a valid one.”
   “The thesis […] provides the focal point for the rest of the essay.”

3. The paragraphs in the body of the paper include evidence and argument that you need to support your thesis. Some attention should be paid to summarizing the content of the document, to make sure your reader knows what the document is about (and in this case, so that your professor knows that you understood what the document is about).

4. While it is important to properly attribute and cite everything, be careful with long quotations, particularly in short papers. If you do decide to use a long quotation, make sure that you take the time to explain its significance. Your paper should not be a collection of properly attributed quotations from the document you are analyzing.
5. Your conclusion is not simply the last paragraph of the paper, nor is it just a summary of everything you said in the body of the paper. An effective conclusion (again borrowing from M. L. Rampolla) answers the question of “So what? Why is this important?” What are the implications of this document? How does it add to our understanding of the topic? How does it compare to other materials that we have read/talked about in class?

6. Revise, revise, revise. No one writes a good paper in the first draft. Make sure that your argument makes sense, that you have provided sufficient concrete evidence, and finally that the writing is good.

7. Edit and proofread! Your final paper should be grammatical, free of spelling and typographical errors, and make use of proper verb tense.
   This includes, but is not limited to the following (again, apologies if you already know this):
   --check to see that proper names (e.g. author’s name) are properly spelled
   --avoid slang, colloquialisms and contractions
   --make sure that you have not improperly used “;” (check Strunk&White for proper usage)
   --avoid generalizations, e.g. any variations on “since the beginning of time,” words like “everyone,” “always,” “obviously,” etc.

Please remember that a paper that has not been proofread will receive an automatic “D.”

Citation Format

If you are only going to be citing from the document(s) you are analyzing, you can use parenthetical form of citation:
   For example, if you are quoting something by Caffey, you will cite it as (Caffey, 266).
   If you are quoting something from the little introductory blurb about Ms. Caffey, make sure you attribute it to the editor of the document collection, in this case James Overfield (Overfield, 265).
History B3XX
Final Paper Assignment

Choose a topic that deals with some aspect of the Holocaust or another 20th century genocide and write a 15 page research or historiographical paper (Times 12, double spaced). (Note: you can not write about Hitler.)

If you choose to write a historiographical paper, it is important to pick a question that has received sufficient historiographical attention in English (or any other language you are comfortable with) and that has seen some debates/disagreements to make the paper interesting. You should also choose a topic that has not been covered or will not be covered in great detail in class.

If you choose to write a research paper, it is crucial that you choose a topic for which you can find the necessary primary sources in English (or any other language that you are comfortable with). In fact, you may want to first explore the possible primary sources (diaries, memoirs, government documents, works of literature, etc.) and develop a topic based on the sources that you find.

Getting Started:

1. Talk to me.
2. Helmke library’s course webpage created by Summer Tritt (you will be notified as soon as it is available)
3. The resource pages from www.ushmm.org (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)
4. IUCAT library catalog
5. www.jstor.org and Project Muse (through Helmke library webpage)
6. WorldCat

Schedule

• Pre-Proposal Meeting
   After thinking about your topic, you should make an appointment to discuss your preliminary ideas with me. This appointment needs to take place before September 24.

• Paper Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography DUE by October 15
   The proposal (1-2 pages) should describe your topic and the question(s) you are trying to answer in your paper. (Reminder: You must discuss your research topic with me before you submit your proposal.)
   The bibliography you submit should consist of 2 parts:
   Part 1: Primary sources (at least 5) with a paragraph explaining how you are planning to use them
   Part 2: Secondary sources (at least 5)
   The bibliography should give some indication of the type and range of sources you are planning to use (and whether the available sources will help answering your question).
   Your bibliography should be organized in such a way that makes it clear how you plan to use the sources that you have found (in some cases, you may be making guesses, but your bibliography should also include books that you have already examined).

• Progress Report and Updated Bibliography DUE by November 5
   Your progress report should give us an idea of how your research is progressing: have you found the materials you need? Have you formulated a thesis? Etc.
   You should include a 4-5 sentence paragraph describing your topic.
   Your updated bibliography should address any deficiencies in your preliminary bibliography and should map out your research plans for the rest of the semester.
The updated bibliography should make it clear how the new sources you have found, both primary and secondary, will help you answer your research questions.
Please attach a graded copy of your research proposal and preliminary bibliography.

**Writing Update**  **DUE by November 19**
Turn in a detailed outline of your research paper.
Your outline should include not only general section headings, but make it clear what materials you are going to be using for each section.
Please attach graded copies of your research proposal, preliminary bibliography, progress report, and updated bibliography.

**Final Paper and Final Bibliography**
**DUE BY December 3 (hard copy only; no exceptions)**
Please attach graded copies of your research proposal, preliminary bibliography, progress report, updated bibliography, and writing update.
Check Blackboard for citation and formatting rules.

Some helpful writing tips (and hints):

1. Make sure that your paper has a clear thesis statement and argument. Have you used sufficient evidence to support your argument? Does your paper begin with a clear introduction and end with a conclusion? Consult Rampolla for additional suggestions about writing a research paper.

2. Revise, revise, revise. No one writes a good paper in the first draft. Make sure that your argument makes sense, that you have provided sufficient concrete evidence, and finally that the writing is good. Your final paper should be grammatical, free of spelling and typographical errors, and make use of proper verb tense.

3. History papers are cited according to Chicago Style, which includes footnotes (or endnotes), and a complete bibliography. (Hint: I strongly prefer footnotes.) The footnotes refer directly to specific passages in sources from which you are borrowing, and proper citation is essential to avert any suspicion of plagiarism, as well as to support your claim that you examined and utilized sources and made intellectual progress. The bibliography is less specific, and is not a “works cited.” In the bibliography you will include every source you examined that influenced your thought process relative to the paper, as well as the sources you directly cited in your footnotes and endnotes. All internet sources must be pre-approved by the instructor.

4. Avoid vague generalizations and unnecessary filler words/phrases. Please don’t start your paper with the expression “since the beginning of time” (or any variation of it). Avoid expressions like “I think” and “in my opinion.” I assume that anything you write indicates your opinions and ideas, unless you indicate otherwise.

5. Please use font Times 12. Don’t forget to number your pages.

6. Though I am sure this is not necessary in a 300-level class:
   a. if your paper has not been proof-read, you will receive an automatic D for the assignment
   b. if you plagiarize any part of your paper (see plagiarism handout), you will receive an automatic F for the semester
   c. electronic submissions are not acceptable
   d. late papers receive a penalty of one letter grade per day
   e. papers that are too short or too long receive a one letter grade penalty
History B3XX
Plagiarism Information Handout

The IPFW Student Handbook Planner (2003-2004) defines plagiarism as

"The adoption or reproduction of ideas or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgment."

Specific examples of plagiarism are:
- copying without proper documentation (quotation marks and a citation) written or spoken words, phrases, or sentences from any source;
- summarizing without proper documentation (usually a citation) ideas from another source (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge);
- borrowing facts, statistics, graphs, pictorial representations, or phrases without acknowledging the source (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge);
- collaborating on a graded assignment without instructor's approval;
- submitting work, either in whole or part, created by a professional service and used without attribution (e.g. paper, speech, bibliography, or photograph).

Both paraphrasing and direct quotations should be used sparingly. Good writing involves expressing your own ideas in your own words.

- Paraphrase only when you want to explicitly discuss another author's ideas.
- Use direct quotations only to present source material that you want to comment on or to highlight a particularly well-phrased passage.
- When you are using a quotation, make sure it is grammatically integrated into your paper.

Citations are required every time you use the ideas or words of another author. For some examples of what constitutes plagiarism, see http://www.princeton.edu/py/pub/integrity/pages/plagiarism.html.

In your written work for this course, you should use the Chicago Manual of Style's "Documentary-Note Style," as described in: http://www.lib.uga.edu/ref/chicago.html. Additional handouts will be given with more information on proper citation format on your final paper. If you have any questions, you should talk to your instructor or the teaching assistant.

Any instance of plagiarism will result in a failing grade in this class. Ignorance of the definition of plagiarism is not a valid excuse.
Preparing for Class

Before each class:

1. Make sure you have done the assigned reading (if any). (Take a look at the handout on reading strategies.)
   a. Does the reading assignment make sense? Are there any words that you need to look up in the dictionary?
   b. Do you understand the main point(s)/argument(s) of the document? (Make sure you take a look at the handout on how to analyze sources.)
   c. How does the reading assignment fit with the material covered in the lecture (and/or textbook)?
   d. Can you explain the piece to someone else? (If you can’t, you should read it again.)

2. Look over your lecture notes. (It might be a good idea to do this after class, while the lecture is still fresh in your mind.) Does everything still make sense? Is there anything you want to ask the professor about in the beginning of class?
Handout on Sources

To answer their questions, historians evaluate, organize, and interpret a wide variety of sources. These sources fall into two broad categories: primary sources and secondary sources.

**Primary Source**—any document that was produced contemporaneously with the events or developments under study: letters, diaries, pamphlets, legal and official records, newspapers, memoirs, works of art, films, interviews, etc.

Primary sources provide the original evidence we use to reconstruct what happened in the past. Primary sources are to historians what artifacts are to the archeologists.

**Secondary Source**—a study done by historians and others writing after an event has been completed; books and articles in scholarly journals that comment on and interpret primary sources.

Both primary and secondary sources can provide valuable information; however, they provide different kinds of information.

Primary sources allow you to enter the lives and minds of the people you are studying, bringing you in direct contact with the world of the past.

Secondary sources are written by historians who can provide a broader perspective on the events of the past than the people who actually participated in them since they have more information about the context and outcome of those events, an awareness of multiple points of view, and access to more documents than any single participant.

**Evaluating and Analyzing Sources**

Primary sources comprise the basic material with which historians work. Nevertheless, historians do not take the evidence provided by such sources imply at face value. Like good detectives, they evaluate the evidence, approaching their sources analytically and critically.

Questions to consider when evaluating written primary sources (*note: this should help you with preparing for discussions of reading assignments and for your writing assignments*):

• Who is the author?
• How does the author's gender and/or socioeconomic class and/or race/ethnicity/national origin compare to the people about whom he or she is writing?
• Why did he or she write the source? (What was the stated purpose for writing? Was this the real purpose?)
• Who was the intended audience?
• What unspoken assumptions does the text contain?
• Are there detectable biases in the source?
• When was the source composed?
• What is the historical context in which the source was written and read?
• Are there other contemporary sources to compare against this one?
• What was the author's main argument?
• How did the author try to convince the audience?
• Why did the author choose to write in the form or style that he did?
• Why is this source important?
• How does this source help us understand the time period under consideration better? (Be careful about what it can tell us and what it can’t tell us.)
Some Suggestions for Successful Reading Strategies

You should use a different strategy for the different reading assignments in this class.

Short Primary Documents

You are expected to do a very close reading of the text. When a document is only 1-2 pages long, everything is important—word choices, style, rhetorical devices, etc. Quickly skimming the pages will not prepare you for class discussion (or help you on the midterm and final exams).

Look at the handout on sources for some sample questions to consider.

Secondary Sources

In reading, your goal should always be to get all the way through the assignment. It’s much more important to have a general grasp of the arguments or hypotheses, evidence, and conclusions than to understand every detail. In fact, no matter how carefully you read, you won’t remember most of the details anyway.

What you can do is remember and record the main points. And if you remember those, you know enough to find the material again if you ever do need to recall the details.

As soon as you start to read, begin trying to find out four things:

- Who is the author?
- What are the book’s arguments?
- What is the evidence that supports these?
- What are the book’s conclusions?

Once you’ve got a grip on these, start trying to determine:

- What are the weaknesses of these arguments, evidence, and conclusions?
- What do you think about the arguments, evidence, and conclusions?
- How does (or how could) the author respond to these weaknesses, and to your own criticisms?

Focus on the parts of the book with the highest information content.

Non-fiction books very often have an “hourglass” structure that is repeated at several levels of organization. More general (broader) information is presented at the beginnings and ends of:

- the book as a whole (abstract, introduction, conclusion)
- each chapter
- each section within a chapter
- each paragraph

More specific (narrow) information (supporting evidence, details, etc.) is presented in the middle.

Mark up your reading. Underlining and making notes in the margins is a very important part of active reading.

But don’t mark too much. This defeats the purpose of markup; when you consult your notes later, it will force you to re-read unimportant information. Rather than underline whole
sentences, underline words or short phrases that capture what you most need to remember. The point is to distill, reduce, eliminate the unnecessary. Write words and phrases in the margins that tell you what paragraphs or sections are about. Use your own words.

Know the intellectual context: A book is almost always party a response to other writers, so you’ll understand a book much better if you can figure out what, and who, it is answering. Pay attention to the people and writings the author cites in support of his/her argument.

Be realistic. The mind, like the body, gets tired, especially when it’s doing just one thing for many hours. Your ability to comprehend and retain what you read drops off dramatically after an hour or so. Therefore, you should read a book in several short sessions of one or two hours apiece, rather than one long marathon.

For the longer writing assignments, it might be a good idea to get started at least a week before the book is due. Make sure you take good notes so you still remember what it is about when we discuss it in class.

(Material borrowed from “How to Read a Book: Strategies for Getting the Most out of Non-Fiction Reading” by Paul N. Edwards)