New Course Request

Indiana University
Fort Wayne Campus

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

1. School/Division: Arts and Sciences
2. Academic Subject Code: HIST
3. Course Number: D310 (must be cleared with University Enrollment Services)
4. Instructor: Ann Livschiz
5. Course Title: Russian Revolutions and Soviet Regime

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

6. First time this course is to be offered (Semester/Year): Spring 2011

7. Credit Hours: Fixed at 3  or Variable from to

8. Is this course to be graded S-F (only)? Yes ☐ No x

9. Is variable title approval being requested? Yes ☐ No x

10. Course description (not to exceed 50 words) for Bulletin publication: Causes and development of Russian revolutions and civil war; Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin; purges, terror, economic development, society, and arts under Stalin; struggle against Hitler; scope and limits of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev; minorities, dissent, and life in the Soviet Union. Credit given for only one of D410 or D310.

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: In the past I have offered the D410 version of this course. D310 exists in the course catalog at IU-Bloomington. I believe that our students will be better

16. Are the necessary reading materials currently available in the appropriate library? Yes served with a 300-level course.

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: Date 9/3/09

Date Department Chairman/Division Director

Date Dean of Graduate School (when required)

Approved by: Date 10/14/09

Date Dean

Date Chancellor/Vice-President

Date 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 D310: Russian Revolutions and Soviet Regime
Proposed Teaching Time: Spring 2011

Course Description
The course explores the causes and development of Russian revolutions and civil war, Stalin's rise to power; economic, social, and cultural development of the Soviet Union under Stalin; Great Patriotic War; scope and limits of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev; mature socialism and Gorbachev's efforts at reforms; collapse of the Soviet Union.

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%) (full descriptions on Blackboard)
  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 IPFW email accounts for breaking news about Russian and Soviet History, 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 get 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 Russia.
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 Livschitz/Hello, Dr. Livschitz/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:

G. Hosking, First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union From Within (textbook)

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

A. Applebaum, Gulag: A History

R. Overy, Russia’s War: A History of the Soviet Effort, 1914-1945

L. Chukovskiaia, Sofia Petrovna

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.

For each unit on the schedule, a schedule of due dates for the specific reading assignments will be provided.

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

Part I: Russia Before 1917 (January 10—January 21)
Topics: • Society, Geography, Economy, Politics: An Overview
• Revolutionary Movements
• Imperial Expansion and Russo-Japanese War
• Revolution of 1905 and October Manifesto
• Reform vs. Revolution
• Art and Culture

Textbook: Hosking, 15-34
Readings: Haimson (Blackboard), “The Falsehood of Democracy” (handout on Wednesday, January 16), “Revolutionary Russia” (Blackboard), Durnovo (ReservesExpress)

Part II: Wars and Revolutions, 1914-1921 (January 24—February 11)
Topics: • World War I
• Revolutions of 1917: October and February
• Lenin and the Bolsheviks
• Civil War and War Communism
• Failure of World Revolutions

Textbook: Hosking, 35-92
Readings: Kolonitskii (Blackboard), Holquist (Blackboard), “Voices of the People” (ReservesExpress)

Important Date:
Wednesday, February 2: ••WRITING ASSIGNMENT NO. 1 DUE••

Part III: 1920s (February 14—February 25)
Topics: • New Economic Policy (NEP)
• Lenin’s death and struggle for leadership
• Stalin’s rise to power
• Making of the Soviet Union

Textbook: Hosking, 93-149
Reading Assignments: Naiman (Blackboard), Fitzpatrick (ReservesExpress), Slezkine (Blackboard), Gorsuch (Blackboard)

Important Date:
Friday, February 25: ••TAKE HOME MIDTERM DUE••

Part IV: 1930s: Socialism and Stalinism (March 2—March 25)
Topics: • Socialism in One Country
• Industrialization
• Collectivization
• Soviet Art and Culture
• Purges and Terror
• Soviet Nationalities Policy
• New Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman

Textbook: Hosking, 149-260
Readings: Applebaum (parts I and II), “Writers’ Congress” (ReservesExpress), Martin (Blackboard), John Scott (Blackboard), Sofia Petrovna

Important date:
Wednesday, March 23: ••WRITING ASSIGNMENT NO. 2 DUE••

Part V: Great Patriotic War (March 30—April 1)
Topics: •International Situation 1920s-1930s  
•Winter War  
•Eastern Front  
•Domestic and International Consequences of Soviet Victory  

Textbook: Hosking, 261-295  
Readings: Overy (take home quiz due on or before the day we discuss it in class);  

Part VI: Postwar Stalinism, De-Stalinization, and the Cold War (April 6 — April 15)  
Topics: •Postwar Soviet Union: Return to Normality  
•Khrushchev and De-Stalinization: Revolution Revisited  
•Space Race, Spy Games, and the Third World  

Textbook: Hosking, 296-362  

Part VII: Mature Socialism and Efforts at Reform (April 20 — April 22)  
Topics: •Brezhnev: The End of Revolution?  
•Gorbachev’s Revolution  
•Collapse of the Soviet Union  
•Dissident Movement  

Textbook: Hosking, 363-502  
Readings: Lewin (ReservesEXpress), Baranskaia (Blackboard)  

Part VIII: Post-Soviet Russia: New Russia? (April 27 — April 29)  
Topics: •Yeltsin years  
•Putin’s Revolution  
•Contemporary Russia  

Readings: “Contemporary Russia Reader” (Blackboard), Applebaum (epilogue)  

Important Date:  
Tuesday, April 25: ***FINAL PAPER DUE***
READING ASSIGNMENTS (listed on the syllabus)
These are articles or short primary documents.


K. Pobedonostsev, “The Falsehood of Democracy”

“Revolutionary Russia” Packet (revolutionary propaganda from different political perspectives)

P. Durnovo, “Memorandum to the Tsar, 1914”

B. Kolonitskii, “Antibourgeois Propaganda and Anti-"Burzhui" Consciousness in 1917”

P. Holquist, "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work": Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context”

P. Holquist, “Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905-21”

“Voices of the People” Packet (letters from the revolutionary period)

E. Naiman, “Revolutionary Anorexia (NEP as a Female Complaint)”

A. Gorsuch, “‘A Woman is Not a Man’: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928”


Y. Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”

T. Martin, “Soviet Union as an Affirmative Action Empire”

J. Scott, Behind the Urals (selections)

“Writers’ Congress” Packet (documents dealing with Soviet cultural policy)


E. Zubkova, “Russia after the War”

“Secret Speech”—N. Khrushchev’s speech at the 20th Party Congress

M. Lewin, “The Gorbachev Phenomenon”

N. Baranskaia, A Week Like Any Other

“Contemporary Russia Reader” (Blackboard),
History D310
Writing Assignment 1: Primary Source Analysis
DUE: Wednesday, February 2

For the first writing assignment, you are asked to write a 3 page paper (double-spaced, Times font 12), analyzing the following document: Konstantin (Constantine) Pobedonostsev’s “Criticism of Modern Society” (see attached).

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.

   “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 Pobedonostsev, you will cite it as (Pobedonostsev, 266).
   If you are quoting something from the little introductory blurb about Mr. Pobedonostsev, make sure you attribute it to the editor of the document collection, in this case Basil Dmytryshyn: (Dmytryshyn, 317).
History D310
Final Paper Assignment

Choose any topic that deals with some aspect of Russian or Soviet history (chronological range 1890s—1980s) and write a 15 page research or historiographical paper (Times 12, double spaced).

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. (For example, you can not write a paper about Stalin.)

Some examples of possible topics:
• role of P. Stolypin
• role of national revolutionary parties in the pre-1917 revolutionary movement
• post-emancipation peasant communes

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.
3. Helmke library’s course webpage created by Summer Tritt (you will be notified as soon as it is available)
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 February 18. There will be a sign up sheet on our office doors (CM 277 for Professor Erickson; CM 275 for Professor Livschiz).

• Paper Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography DUE by Friday, March 2
  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 Wednesday, March 30
  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 Monday, April 11
  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 Monday, April 25  (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 D310
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/pt/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.libs.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
(borrowed from M. L. Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 5th ed.)

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)