

## Tips for Reading

- **Recognize that these readings are not a textbook.** Most of these readings are academic books or articles as well as policy-oriented journals like *Foreign Affairs*. This means that as a reader, you might have to look up some of the background material, pay close attention to/look up key terms (the weekly handouts can help you here), and think about how the different readings fit together on your own.
- **Find the main arguments.** When you start reading an article or a book, your first goal should be to figure out what the author is trying to say. Sometimes this is easy—the author might say “I argue” or something similar—but other times you may have to read between the lines and look for the author’s point. Even when recounting a specific period of history or some recent event, the author may be trying to make a more theoretical or policy-based point.
- **Make use of chapter titles, sections, and subsections.** As you read, use these as hints to what points the author is making. Why is this chapter/section/sub-section titled what it is? How do these various titles relate to each other? You can even use such headings to help build up an outline if you’d so like.
- **Evaluate the arguments.** Most of these articles advance some kind of argument, so evaluate them like any other argument. Do they provide convincing evidence from the real world? Do they generalize from specific cases or do they try to bring in a wider range of statistical evidence? Are their arguments logical or do they skip a few steps? Do they rely on reasonable assumptions? Thinking through the strengths and weaknesses of each argument will be helpful when you’re called upon to distinguish between different theories and critically analyze them.
- **Note potential connections to other readings.** You might ask yourself as you read “What would X author think of this point?” Jot down any connections that you see as you read or listen and then come back to think about those later.
- **Always ask “why?” as you read.** Some examples: why is this author using this example? Why is this reading included with these other readings? Why is the author making this assumption? Why is this article claiming that X will inevitably follow from Y?

## Tips for Taking Notes (in both the readings and lecture)

- **Do not take an excessive amount of notes.** We will have many readings this semester. As you start to review them for the exams, you’ll thank yourself for pulling out the main points in each reading and from lecture rather than transcribing both verbatim.
- **Summarize and critique the main arguments from each reading.** What is the author arguing in each reading? What point is the author trying to make? Do you think that they succeed or might there be weaknesses? Summarize those critiques along with the main points of the reading and make connections to other readings as appropriate.
- **Think strategically about potential exam questions.** Is there a particular question that’s hotly contested between authors? Are there two contrasting approaches that would have very different policy recommendations for how to handle a contemporary issue like Iran’s nuclear program? Thinking about and trying to come up with potential exam questions in advance can help you organize your notes and be better prepared for what comes up on exams. *Note: Do not, however, try to answer a different question than what actually appears on the exam. Instead, use this process to help sharpen your thinking and cases to draw on.*