

Tips for Reading Philosophy

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General Tips

1. **Set aside an adequate amount of time.** This will likely be longer than you'd expect or like. (It often takes me 5+ minutes to read a single page of philosophy, and I'm a relatively experienced reader at this point.)
2. **When you're done reading, try to summarize the main thesis of the article.** Write it down somewhere that's easy to find (e.g. at the top of the article, or in a specific folder or notebook).
 - Prompt: Imagine someone asked you at a party what the article you read today was about. What would you say?
3. **Make use of resources.** Reading philosophy is hard. There is nothing wrong with trying to supplement your reading by looking through online resources (e.g. SEP) or YouTube.
 - That said, it's important to not use these as a *substitute*: for most contemporary articles, there are no electronic resources available, so you need to have the skill of reading things on your own.
4. **Prepare to be frustrated.** Reading philosophy is *hard*, and it is a skill that takes time to develop. You may be frustrated at times. This is totally normal and a sign that you're appreciating how difficult these articles can be!

Note-Taking Strategies

1. **Annotate while reading:** Highlight. I suggest using some sort of color-coding system. For example, I use purple for key terms, green for main theses/the most important claims, and yellow for important details.
2. **Take notes.** You can take notes in a separate document *while* you're reading, or after. Note: one risk while taking notes along side reading is that you're more at risk of missing the forest for the trees. I suggest taking notes immediately after reading, or after each section (or few pages).
3. **Distinguish between Summary Comments and Critical Commentary:** Whether your note-taking is in the form of annotations in the document or a separate document, it's important to distinguish between when you're summarizing parts of the article and when you're adding commentary of your own.
 - For example, if I am making marginalia, I will include summary notes in blue text and my own commentary/questions in red. Sometimes my own comments are just question marks, and that is fine too—it's good to make a note of where you were confused or where you had questions. These can be useful things to come back to before prepping for discussion section or a paper.
 - When I take notes in a separate document, I tend to add my initials before my own commentary. This makes them easily searchable as well.

4. **Keep a Glossary.** There is a lot of jargon in philosophy. Have a document on your computer where you keep track of key terms you learn while reading, and look up definitions as appropriate. (The Oxford Philosophy dictionary is great for this.)
5. Think about creating a record for your future self and to help with discussion!

Above and Beyond: If you have extra time

1. **Read it again (and again).** We often hear advice to read the same paper over and over again. Unfortunately, this is too time-consuming for most of the time, as we're all balancing various commitments. Focus on reading the paper once slowly. That said, you can gain a lot by reading the same paper over again, and you ought to be very familiar with any article that you critically engage with in a paper of your own.
2. **Practice Mentally Summarizing.** After each paragraph, close your eyes and summarize mentally what the last paragraph you read was about. (You can do this for entire sections or the entire paper instead.)
3. **Write up some exposition:** Write a summary of the article (e.g. in a blog post-like format).
4. **Write down some questions you have:** These can be clarificatory questions and/or substantive ones. These can also be helpful starting points for discussion.