

READING TIPS FOR ENGLISH LITERATURE — A WRITING ASSISTANT'S ADVICE

Not surprisingly, a literature class is all about reading. Yes, you should show up to class, pay attention, and take notes, but what really matters is that you know the material you're studying. The only way to do that is to read the assigned texts, so the following tips are all about reading.

DO THE READINGS BEFORE CLASS

It is very tempting to wait until the professor has discussed a piece before tackling it, but this strategy only results in your missing half the points being made in class. You would be wasting your time and may lose interest, stop listening, and eventually stop showing up to class altogether. This usually leads to not doing the reading either

READ WITH A SPECIFIC GOAL IN MIND

Using the course description as a guideline, focus your reading on specific aspects of the texts such as narration, genre, etc. In other words, don't just read casually. This will force you to pay attention to what you're reading. Also, it will give you ideas for that upcoming essay: brainstorm as you read

WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE TEXT AS YOU READ

Notes are very useful for when you are looking for a quotation to prove your point. Is there anything more annoying than sifting through 200 pages for a single sentence that may or may not exist? Writing down your thoughts as you read allows you to avoid this problem

DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ABUSE YOUR BOOK

Take notes in the margin, turn down pages, underline relevant passages, etc. However, don't highlight. If you highlight the wrong thing, you can't erase it. You are then stuck with a distracting highlighted segment with no real relevance. That half-hour you later spend trying to figure out why that passage is important is time lost on your upcoming essay

DIVIDE UP YOUR READING TIME

Don't read for too long! Reading too much at a time will exhaust you. Be strategic about the way you dispense your energy. Make every minute of studying count by making sure you are well rested and up to the challenge

MOST IMPORTANTLY, ENJOY YOUR READING

Reading is demanding, but don't turn it into a chore by focusing solely on grades, assignments, and pleasing your professor. You will only succeed in making the course unbearable. If a text is particularly difficult, for example, you can focus on a general sense of accomplishment or establish a reward system: give yourself a treat for every 25 pages you go through. Also, you presumably took a literature course because you enjoy literature. Never lose sight of that.