HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR READING
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October 2018

In reading an article, it is helpful to ask and answer 5 questions about what you've read:

1. What is the *question* being asked in the article? What is the problem or "puzzle" that the author addresses?
Example: "Why has there been no major socialist party in America when similar societies in Europe have strong socialist parties?"
Why is this helpful? Useful for remembering which authors are associated with which topics for exam study or for writing papers.

2. What is the author's *argument* or thesis? (How does s/he answer the question in #1?)
Example: "There has been no major socialist party in America because any attempts at socialist organization have been punished with repression, because the working class has been divided by race and ethnicity, and because the Western frontier provided an escape valve during the early phases of industrialization."
Why is this helpful? Useful for reviewing major schools of thought about a topic for exams and papers; and for formulating your own arguments in papers and essays that oppose, refine, or agree with existing arguments.

3. What is the *structure* of the author's argument?
Example: "The author first shows the extent of repression of socialist organization in the US, from late 19th-century union-busting through McCarthyism in the 1950s, showing that this repression weakened socialist leadership cadres. Then she documents the racial and ethnic divisions of the working class in Northern industrial cities, using social movement theory to show why these divisions caused a problem for collective action. Finally, she draws on Veblen's theory of the frontier as a "safety valve" to show that the possibility for westward expansion, available in the US but not in Europe, defused working-class tensions and provided poor soil for a socialist movement to take root.
Why is this helpful? Helps identify where in an article to look for more detailed information; points to potential structural weaknesses in an argument; gives examples for how to structure your own arguments in papers and exam essays; helps you develop a deeper understanding of the question and argument. This will also help you recall some of the detail in #4 below.

4. What kinds of *evidence* does the author present to support his/her thesis? What does this evidence tell us? Why is it important for the argument?
Example: "The author analyzes Supreme Court interpretations of anti-trust legislation to show that the court interpreted anti-trust broadly, construing unions as monopolists and applying legal sanctions to their attempts to organize workers along socialist lines. This legal repression of unions and their leaders discouraged socialist party organization."
[This is just one piece of evidence. You could to provide similar synopses of all major pieces of evidence offered by the author.]

Why is this helpful? Provides you with evidence that you could use in making your own arguments in papers and exam essays. NOTE that this is the least effective form of note-taking for stimulating rapid recall, and doing too much of this may slow you down with limited payoff. If you've done #3 above well, you should be able to go back to the original article and find evidence easily.

5. What is your *reaction* to the article? How did you feel when you were reading the article? What questions or criticisms does the author's argument or use of evidence raise in your mind?
Example: "Reading the article made me feel smart because it was really clear and the language wasn't dry or boring. I found the author's argument convincing for the American case, but didn't think it explained the DIFFERENCE between America and Europe very well. Wasn't there also repression of early socialist organization in Europe? And didn't a lot of Europeans come to America, kind of like a safety valve? She didn't mention or refute these counter-arguments about Europe, and this weakened her overall case about America."
Why is this helpful?
Research has shown that recording your emotional reaction to an article is the single best trigger for recording the substantive content. So if you have time to write down only ONE note after reading an article, make it your emotional reaction to what you read. Did it make you angry? Energized? Excited? Tired? Frustrated? Why did it make you feel this way?