

Tips on Reading Anthropology Articles

At times some students struggle with anthropological articles. Two main reasons for that are (1) articles might be full of ethnographic details and thus it is easy to get lost in them, and (2) also possible that the theoretical language and style of presenting arguments is unfamiliar. Here are some strategies for getting the most out of your reading. Most importantly, read actively, not passively.

1. Pick the right time

Unlike reading a novel, a story, or a news article, reading social science is not a leisurely activity that you can do well if you are feeling sleepy or really tired (I mean mental tiredness). Please try to do your readings when you are reasonably alert and energetic in order to avoid frustration as some texts might require your close attention.

2. Skim in order to get a general sense of the text.

Get a sense of the main topic, structure of the article, its components, and the material presented first. You also need to situate the article in time and within the disciplinary discussion. To do so, read the title, introductory paragraph, questions, the subtitles, and skim the whole article in order to get an overall sense of a given piece. Ask the following questions.

- When the author was writing? (look at the publication date)
- What seem to be the themes and questions of the article?

3. Engage in Reading

As you read, try to answer the following questions (ideally by writing notes)

- What is the author's main point?
- Who are her main interlocutors (discussion members or POV)?

- What is the conversation between the author and the interlocutors?
- Methodology: how she or he go about doing her research? What evidence does she present, and what does she minimize or ignore?
- What are some of the useful concepts that the author presents?
- How does this reading relate to prior readings and to the themes of the lectures?
- Does the author successfully defend her or his argument?

As you answer these questions, you will go back and forth and re-read many parts of the text, etc. Remember, social science articles rarely have a linear narrative and they are not structured around a single plot, like a novel or story. Therefore, reading them in a linear fashion does not always work! Imagine yourself as a helicopter flying over a single territory with various landmarks and stopping at each one to explore. Then, you make a sense of how the individual parts come together.

4. Debate what you just read.

- After you finish reading, try to summarize or paraphrase the main argument in your notebook.
- Think about how and why the author is arguing what she is arguing. Think about why the author feels his or her argument is important, relevant, novel, or exciting.
- Now read the article as if you are having a debate with the author. Do you agree with the author? Why? Do you disagree? Why? If you disagree, offer your alternative explanations. Note down why the conclusions do not make sense. Note down why you found conclusions convincing or exciting.

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