Tips: Reading in Humanities Courses

**Before you begin:**

1. You probably have a lot of reading in Humanities courses. Split it up—make a plan that includes reading shorter portions (30-50 pages) of reading at a time.
2. Get in the right mind frame. Are you reading in a place that has minimal distractions? Do you have appropriate lighting. Reading is best done sitting at a table to...

3. Reread your syllabus to determine the theme or focus of the reading. This will give you some clue as to what your professor is hoping to highlight, or have you get out of the reading.
4. Skim the text to determine the basics of the reading: who is the author? What do you know about the perspective he/she is coming from? Look for keys words and subtitles throughout. This pro-

**During your reading:**

5. Be an active reader: mark up your pages. Highlight, circle words you don't know, keep notes on main arguments presented.
6. Don't be intimidated by large vocabulary. If there are particular words used over and over again that you are confused about, look them up. For other words, see if you can glean their meaning from the context of the passage.
7. If you feel that you're not comprehending a passage
8. Write in the margins of your text the tone and the main idea for each passage you read. Note where tone changes occur, or there is a shift in argument. Be on the lookout for transitional words: “however;” “but;” “yet.” This will make going back over the text easier later, as you have the main ideas marked, and can see where the author has made the main arguments in the passage.
9. Create a coding system to save you time. You could use different colors or symbols to indicate when you agree and/or disagree with an idea, or read an argument or passage that supports something you would like to address in a future assignment, essay, or paper. Use question marks for things you don’t understand, and exclamation marks for things you feel strongly about in the reading.
10. You should have an opinion about the reading. As you're reading, think about whether you agree or disagree with the ideas presented, and analyze what would make intriguing arguments for and/or against the author’s viewpoint. Keep a list of these arguments—it will make coming up with ideas for papers easier later!

**After your reading:**

11. Make notes about the major themes/concepts from the reading.
12. If you read multiple articles or texts for a particular chapter, identify the main themes running through them. What was your professor trying to get at by having you read these different passages/texts? How do they tie together? How do they contrast? Write your ideas down.

**Other tips:**

- *When reading Narrative:* pay attention to the relationships between characters, and take close stock of mood or tone shifts in the story. This will give you insight into the main themes within the story.
- If you’re short on time: you can usually find the main ideas in a textbook or a scholarly article by reading the concluding paragraph. Some people find that if they read the summary/conclusion/discussion first, they are able to read the entire article with greater understanding/clarity.