

"How to Gut a Book"

First Step: Find Out What the Author is Arguing? What is the Thesis?

- Look for the argument in the introduction. It is usually a straightforward point of view that the author is setting out to prove.
- Use a highlighter and pencil/pen. Argue with the author. Question him or her. What strikes you as the most important point?
- It is easy to forget 10-pages into reading a book...so routinely remind yourself of the thesis.
- Also use the table of contents for what it was intended for – an outline of the author's argument
- Now, look to the bibliography. What are the sources?
- Look for an author's perspective and biases. What is his or her lens?

Second Step: Now We Can Start Reading

- First read the introduction.
- Then read the conclusion.
- Both of these sections will reinforce each other – common phrases, common ideas, main points, etc.
- Next, begin reading the chapters. Read the first and last paragraphs of each chapter to get the main points. Historians do repeat themselves.

Third Steps: Footnotes and Endnotes

- They can be incredible helpful to understand the sources, as well as the author's extraneous discussions and historical background.
- "The revenge of the history professors" – They write in opaque manner to prove they are smarter. This is a fact of academic writing, but you must work through it.

When You are Done:

- Write everything down about the book that you read - full bibliographic information. In this way you can footnote and cite as appropriate. Be careful not to plagiarize and give credit where it is due.

When to Read:

- If you are nodding off when you are reading – then you will not be able to extract the information you need.
- Know yourself and when is the best time to read.
- Keep up with your reading – don't fall behind. Plan ahead.

Last Notes on Books:

- Respect the books that you are lent and take care of them. They should be returned in a pristine condition.