

## Critical Reading Guidelines

You will be assigned a tremendous amount of reading while you are in Divinity School. Your professors have carefully chosen lots of books and articles for you to read because they want you to see and understand many different perspectives. They want you to encounter new ideas and examine what you already know with new lenses. To make the most of your experience in Divinity School, you have to learn to read so that you can consistently understand, interpret, and remember what you read. Both the amount and complexity of the reading you are assigned can feel overwhelming, so it is important to be organized and have strategies in place to ensure that the time you spend reading is not wasted.

### *Three Stages of Effective Reading:*

**Before** – Preview the text. Look over the Table of Contents, chapter title, headings, and subheadings, back cover, information about the author, etc. When was the text written? What type of text is it? Think about what you hope to learn and what questions you hope will be answered. Think about why you are being asked to read this text. Read briefly the introduction and conclusion.

**During** – Look for main ideas and supporting details. What claims is the author making? How are they supporting those claims? Note places in the reading that challenge your current beliefs or attitudes. Pause after each section to check your understanding and review the main points. Take brief notes as you read or fill in an outline of the text.

**After** – Look back over your notes and markings in the text. What were the main ideas, claims, or arguments? Connect new material to what you already know. Ask critical questions: how well did the author convince you of their arguments? How is this reading important for learning communities? What is missing or what does the author fail to address? Imagine that you have to explain the reading to someone else and think through what you would say about it and what questions you still have.

### *Questions to ask of any text while reading:*

What is the author writing about?

Why is the author writing about it? (purpose)

Who is the author?

Who is the author writing to? (audience)

Who is the author writing against? (the debate)

What is the main point? (the thesis)

So what? (the conclusion)

How does the author prove it? (evidence)

What's behind it all? (underlying assumptions)