If you find that you do hundreds of pages of reading a week, but then struggle to remember what you’ve read once you get to section, or can’t formulate questions or points for discussion, see below for some tips on how to read effectively. Pay the most attention to the introduction and the conclusion of the text—that is often where the writer lays out (or should lay out!) their main argument. Then, take 5-10 minutes after completing your reading to write up answers to the questions below. You can type them or use big index cards.

These questions are very general, and of course each discipline will generate a set of questions specific to the field. But if you take the time to jot down your thoughts on even these basic points, you will be better prepared for class— and when the midterm or final exam rolls around, you’ll have your study guide ready to go!

Questions to Ask While Doing the Reading

1) Who is the author? When are they writing? What is their position in society and/or intellectual role? What is their relationship to the subject they are writing about?

2) What is the main argument of the text? Jot down the main thesis, in your own words, in 1-2 sentences.

3) How does the author make their argument? What kind of evidence do they use? How is the argument structured and laid out? Does the author make any assumptions to construct the argument?

4) What are the argument’s weaknesses? What information does the author overweigh or eliminate? Do they have a bias of any kind?

5) How does the reading relate to other material you have studied in class? Are there any useful
comparisons that can be drawn? Why do you think this material was assigned?

6) Was there anything in the reading you found particularly compelling? Or anything you particularly did not like? If so, can you think analytically about why this was and how it affected or altered the argument at hand?

7) Do you have any questions that have remained unanswered?