

STUDY TIPS FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION

1. Planning for Study

Necessary: Making time for study is very difficult for most of us. To make sure to devote any time to study and especially to turn it into a habit, putting it on a schedule is absolutely necessary. At the beginning of the week, make a schedule and think carefully about what time that week you could fit in any amount of studying. Consider things like, when you are likely to achieve better focus (for some people the early morning hours are ideal because a busy home is quiet and still), the times of the day when you are most productive and awake, moments of the day or the week where you can be undisturbed and have access to places in your home that others won't be using, etc.

2. Have a clear objective

Necessary: Having a clear sense of what you want to achieve with your study is very helpful to stay motivated and to stick to a study commitment. You can start by reminding yourself why you have decided that doing this study is important. Political education unlike academic study is not oriented by the achievement of personal and/or professional aspirations, but rather is connected to a commitment to the development of a political project for our class. Therefore it may be helpful to constantly remind yourself why your organization is counting on you to develop and cultivate knowledge and to think of how important your contribution as an educator is, to the movement you are a part of.

Optional: Specific study goals such as, hours or minutes of study per week, or number of pages read can be helpful for some people to stick to a study program. It's also an option to create daily, weekly or monthly trackers of how much study hours or pages you are completing which for some people can be encouraging. Studying theory, especially dense content like economy or philosophy requires endurance, much like exercise. At first it is very common for people to only manage to concentrate for 10 minutes or less. However, with time, your endurance is likely to improve and you will be able to sit for much longer and focus on difficult reading.

3. Create the necessary conditions for focused studying

Necessary: Having a space to study that is conducive to focus is key. The most important elements to guarantee are a space where you are comfortable and undisturbed. Make sure you have comfortable seating and appropriate lighting because if your back starts aching and your eyes start hurting you are unlikely to sit for more than a few minutes and you won't be able to focus. Also essential to focused studying is that you put your phone on do not disturb, close e-mail apps, and make sure that you will not be called on to attend to any domestic chores during the time that you are planning to study.

Optional: For some people, creating a “study ambience” by playing music, having a clutter-free space, and even some form of decoration, can really help to make study a pleasant experience and not feel like a punishment.

4. TAKE NOTES!

Necessary: Your ability to understand, absorb and remember what you are studying requires some form of organized note-taking, and a system. Very few people are able to remember the content of a theoretical text well, in such a way that they can explain it, use it to teach, refer to it when writing an article or even to disagree with its arguments. There are many note-taking methods and there is a lot of content on YouTube and Instagram that explains all of them. Some basic ideas to get started:

- Theoretical texts are always making one major argument, with many supporting arguments. It is important to try to identify these. You can do this by highlighting what looks like a major argument with one color and the supporting arguments with another color; by articulating the question that the author is trying to answer and writing that in your notes; and by making an outline of the key arguments in your notes. Arguments are often if not always supported by evidence that the author is providing. It is important to distinguish in your notes (or in highlighting colors) what is an argument and what is the evidence that is being provided for that argument.
- Always start reading notes with a heading that includes the name of the text, the author, and the date the text was written (you may also want to write a complete citation which includes the publisher or publication and other information). This is very important because if you find notes in the future and you can't remember what text they came from, it will become very difficult to use them for either a piece you are writing, a class or even to make an argument.
- Create a system to save your notes in an organized way. Your notes can be very useful months or years from now as you are preparing to teach a class or maybe as you are taking on another reading that has a relation to what you are reading now. Filing your notes in a way that they are easy to find is key because it saves you all the effort of having to re-read something you already read just because you can't remember where your notes are.

Optional: Create your own glossary of terms and concepts that you are learning and that are often referenced in your readings. Also, create a list organized by topics of other readings that you think you may want to or need to read. Most theoretical texts are building on previous knowledge or arguing with other ideas, or supporting theses that other authors have created with new evidence. Reading through footnotes and the bibliographies of a text can also help you to find more sources for a specific topic that interests you, and that the author didn't necessarily go deep into. Keeping a list of texts you want to read later, ensures that you are continuing to deepen your knowledge base.