1. Decide how you read best.

Are you okay reading a PDF on a computer screen, or do you need to print out the article? Can you really read in your dorm room, or will you get distracted? Find a place where you can read an entire article uninterrupted.

2. Connect author with title/theme of the work.

Putnam, Bowling Alone (Civil Society).

3. Read title, subtitle, and abstract.

These usually provide a succinct road map to the article, so why skip them?

4. Do not get bogged down in minutiae.

Stick to digging up these three main things:

- Author’s argument or topic of description.
- Main pieces of evidence used to support that argument.
- Significance of the topic, implications of the argument, important conclusions.

5. Resist the urge to highlight.

Try annotating articles with a pen; highlight sparingly. This way, when looking back over the article before class or writing a paper, your eyes can scan the work and find the few important quotes related to the author’s argument.

6. Do not take notes, in notebook or on computer, continuously.

Every few pages stop reading and ask yourself if you are following the argument. Jot down a few notes if necessary while reading, and particularly right after reading. At the end of the piece, your notes on the article should be no longer than 1 page typed. Avoid copying quotes; instead, paraphrase the article’s main points.*** Putting it in your own words forces you to digest and synthesize what the author is arguing. You will save yourself time when it comes to paper writing and exam studying if you do this for each article/chapter throughout the semester.

*** However, ensure that you are truly paraphrasing. If you are mainly copying down a quote but do not put quotation marks and a citation, you may get in trouble when it comes time to write a paper – If you copy text directly from your notes as if you had paraphrased, but in reality you are quoting.
7. Evaluate what you have just read.

After reading, ask yourself and jot down notes regarding the following:
• Is the author offering an explicit theory? Does s/he offer clear IV(s) and DV, and an explanation of causality?
• Is the author’s evidence reliable? Source? Collection? Bias?
• What is the importance/significance of this issue? Theoretical? Substantive/practical?
• How generalizable are the author’s findings? Other countries? Other points in time?

8. Learn to read efficiently.

As you move to more advanced courses, you will not be using your time efficiently if you read every word of every article. This does not mean you skip reading a complete article.

Develop your ability to skim political science articles for important information, usually located in the first and last sentences of paragraphs, and often summarized at the conclusion of sub-sections.

Going the extra mile:

9. Reflect on your writing when reading the work of others.

Recognize when something you are reading is well written. What makes it a good read? Like you, readers in the real world have limited time. Learn strategies for engaging their attention, telling them what you mean upfront, backing it up with evidence, and summarizing and showing the significance of what you argue.

10. Recognize and investigate new vocabulary.

Google “pilloried,” especially if you have seen/heard it more than once. The GRE (grad school SAT) verbal section will be much easier and your own writing will be more precise if you acquire new vocabulary consistently from now until graduation.