

صف العربية ٤١٠

٩/٢/٢٠١٥

كلية ميدلبري

How to Read a 1200-Year Old Text: Tips for success!

1. For the reading assignments, work in groups! I heartily encourage you to seek the advice of your classmates. Multiple perspectives will be necessary to comprehend a number of these texts; moreover, working together can be fun and will make the time fly.
2. The texts that I have chosen generally contain an narrative element, or in some way or another, evoke themes and ideas that resonate into the modern era. I have not chosen any merely because they are old and opaque; there is nothing punitive in the reading list. While reading the texts, ask yourself why you have been assigned this reading and what I could have possibly been aiming for. Look to uncover the significance and beauty of the texts, and don't let yourself get bogged down in the details (including obscure vocabulary or genealogical complexities).
3. Linked to #2, many of the texts contain poetry that are meant to illustrate and emphasize a point within the text, not to present new information. Skim the poems to look for a general meaning, but don't allow yourself to get lost in them or spend precious time trying to unravel every line.
4. For homework assigned on Monday, I expect you to work a minimum of two hours on the Arabic texts (not including other homework tasks which may add some time). For homework assigned on Wednesday, I expect you to work three hours on the Arabic texts. If you find that you haven't completed the Arabic reading within the allotted time, stop reading and move to something else. If you find yourself completing the work in less than two hours, use the remaining time to do the close reading you may not have done the first time around. Read the poems for comprehension. Do some background reading on the characters and places mentioned in the text, or about the author. Write in all *ʿirāb* and *tashkīl*.
5. Use the resources available to you in the library. The Hans Wehr dictionary is an excellent resource for MSA, but Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon (Davis Family Reference: PJ6640 .L3 1984) is the go-to reference for pre-modern Arabic. It's a magnificent piece of scholarship, and draws heavily from the greatest Arabic lexicon of all time: al-Zabīdī's *Tāj al-ʿarūs* (itself worth taking a look at). The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is hands-down the most important and reliable resource for the pre-modern Islamic world. You can access it online through the Davis Family Library. In fact, for your first night's homework, take a look at the entry on "ʿAyyām al-ʿArab"! The digital *EI* is very easy to use and is a major improvement over the hard copy (which our library owns as well). The comprehensive geographical reference work, *Kitāb Muʿjām al-buldān* (by Yāqūt), is available online through the Davis Family Library as well. The digital version that available to us can be a little difficult to navigate, but *Kitāb Muʿjām al-buldān* contains an entry on just about every location you will ever come across in reading about the pre-modern Arab and Islamic worlds. Finally, al-Suyūṭī's *Kitāb lubb al-lubāb fī taḥrīr al-ansāb* can be a useful in tracking down family names and is available online through the Davis Family Library. However, the digital form makes for awkward navigation (like Yāqūt's *Muʿjām al-buldān*).