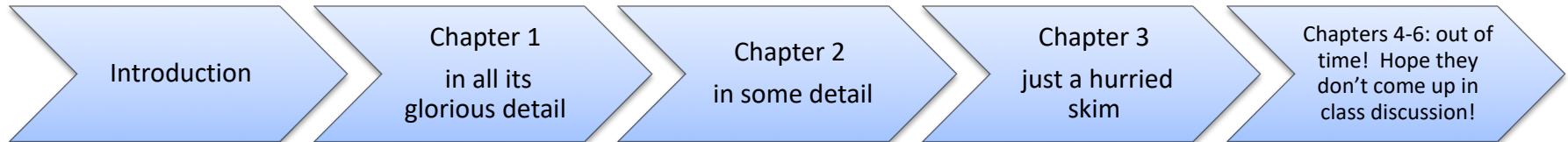# How to Read like a Historian

Chris Endy, Cal State LA, History Department
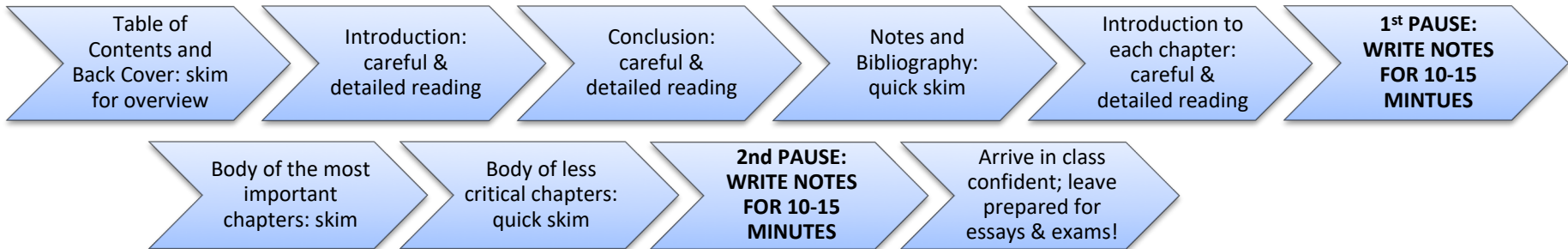
Inspired by Professors Peter Filene and Keith Wailoo at UNC Chapel Hill

For more tips: http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/christopher-endy

The linear method – FLAWED

Introduction → Chapter 1 in all its glorious detail → Chapter 2 in some detail → Chapter 3 just a hurried skim → Chapters 4-6: out of time! Hope they don't come up in class discussion!

The "bookends" method – MORE EFFECTIVE

Table of Contents and Back Cover: skim for overview → Introduction: careful & detailed reading → Conclusion: careful & detailed reading → Notes and Bibliography: quick skim → Introduction to each chapter: careful & detailed reading → 1st PAUSE: WRITE NOTES FOR 10-15 MINTUES

Body of the most important chapters: skim → Body of less critical chapters: quick skim → 2nd PAUSE: WRITE NOTES FOR 10-15 MINUTES → Arrive in class confident; leave prepared for essays & exams!

Questions for Notes Writing During the 1st Pause:

- What is the author's research question, and what is the author's thesis (i.e. the answer to that question)?
- Is the author's thesis or method surprising to you? Why or why not?
- How does this argument and method relate to other readings?
- What evidence do you think the author will need to provide to prove the thesis?
- Which chapters are going to be the most important ones?

Questions for Notes Writing During the 2nd Pause:

- Did you accurately record the thesis during the 1st pause?
- Did the author support the thesis? If so, which chapters and which sources were the most effective or crucial? If not, what evidence or assumptions by the author were weak?
- How does this book relate to other works you've read? Does it confirm other readings? Does it contradict other readings?
- What avenues for new research does this book suggest?