

Reading Marx's Capital – Syllabus and Guide

Hello all, welcome to the **Reading Marx's Capital** class, put on by the East Bay DSA!

Description

The goal of this class is simple: reading Capital Vol 1 and getting a good grasp of the book.

We'll try to answer questions like: *Why is Capital still relevant today? How can I just buy a printer on amazon for \$100, that's crazy? How does Capital relate to things like climate change or immigration? What would a life outside of capitalism look like? Why does technology get developed only to worsen our lives?*

The most important part of the class is the **weekly discussion groups**. In these groups, you'll talk through the reading and get any questions answered. These groups will also keep you disciplined as you read the book, so make attending a habit!

There will also be **monthly lectures** that talk through the book. I hope these will help everyone think through the book, and potentially get a grasp on any sections you find confusing. In general, the lectures will review past reading and give a preview of what's coming up next. If you're here in the Bay Area, you can attend these lectures in person with some food and discussion as well. Otherwise, they will be recorded and put on youtube.

Many of us already know that something is wrong with the world, and we even know that capitalism is the cause. Reading Capital can help you understand why and how capitalism works, and what might be needed to change it.

Expectations for the Class:

Everyone in the class should try to do the following:

- Regularly attend their discussion group for 8-9 months.
- Keep up with the reading of about 30 pages per week (if you do fall a couple weeks behind, skip ahead to stay with the group).
- Watch the lectures when they become available.
- Put in some effort to reproduce the class (texting reminders, bringing food, facilitating the discussion, etc.).

Keeping the Group Together

Based on many past Capital reading groups, I can tell you that it is not easy to keep a group together for 8-9 months. Some people, almost inevitably, will stop coming. And if you miss a couple sessions, it's easy to get so behind you stop coming altogether.

For this reason, everyone should put in the work **(1) to send out reminders before the weekly meetings**, and **(2) to check in with people if they miss a reading group without explanation**. If you do these two things every week, you're much more likely to make it through the class with a solid discussion group. It's best to take some time at the end of every meeting, text people who are unexpectedly missing, and choose someone to send out reminders for the next time.

Your discussion group should also have a group chat where you can send these reminders. This can be on WhatsApp, via normal text, or some other preferred method.

Facilitating the Discussion Groups

Each discussion group should have **rotating facilitation**. That means that everyone should facilitate a session at least once (and probably twice) over the course of the class, and that no one should have to facilitate multiple times in a row. At the end of each meeting, when you pick the person to do reminders for next time, also have someone volunteer to facilitate next week. (Try to facilitate on weeks where you know you have some extra time!)

Here is a rough guide for facilitating, when it's your turn to do it:

Suggestions Before the Meeting

- **Thorough preparation for your section** — read and re-read Marx, and this is the time to read supplementary materials if you're ever going to do so.
 - David Harvey's online lectures on Capital ([2019](#) & [2007](#) editions)
 - David Harvey's [companion book](#).
 - Michael Heinrich's [How to Read Marx's Capital](#). (covers the early chapters)
 - Michael Heinrich's [Introduction to Capital](#).
- Come ready with **multiple passages, concepts, and/or questions to discuss** if the group does not volunteer any at a point during the discussion.

Suggestions Early in the Meeting

- Allow some time for **group bonding** — let people linger in the amount you think they need.

- Start with an **icebreaker question**, like ‘Favorite recent cultural object’ or ‘Worst landlord story’.
- **Ask the group’s overall impression of the chapter(s).**
- **Ask** the group if they would like to **volunteer a passage to read.**
- **Ask** if anyone is **struggling with certain concepts or passages** they came across — and to share.

Suggestions During the Meeting

- **Rephrase peoples’ statements or questions** to clarify them.
- **Summarize the group’s understanding** of an issue.
- **Intervene with your understanding** if others are confused — or wrong.
Remember someone in the group has read Capital before, so you can always ask their thoughts.
- **Intervene to keep the group from a ‘rabbit hole’** on any specific issue that isn’t foundational, especially those outside the text.

Reminders for the End of the Meeting

- Make sure you have a **facilitator for next week** and someone signed up to do reminders. (You may also have people volunteer to bring food, or other tasks)
- **Review** the number of pages of reading for next week. Keep in mind some sections are longer and will take more time to read.

Discussion Group Ground Rules

1. **STICK TO THE READING!!!** – Do not be the person that keeps bringing up other books, ideas, etc. that aren’t in the weekly reading and that others haven’t read. That’s not a discussion group, it’s a ‘listen to me talk group’ and it’s not fair to anyone. (*Occasionally*, it’s fine to get on a tangent *as a group!*)
2. **Both talk and listen** – You should not be talking way more than everyone else. On the other hand, if you’re mostly just listening, try coming to the group with a question or comment!
3. **Keep a culture of thinking out loud** – “I’m not sure if I understand this, but…” is a great way to start a remark in a meeting—we need a culture of thinking out loud. What on earth does this mean? Well, if you hear this preface, it means that the speaker feels comfortable saying something that they are unsure about, which means that they are being open, honest, and they feel safe. Great! Do that yourself and encourage others to speak openly without judgment. Think together!
4. **Try to be kind and keep the vibes good** – Self-explanatory.

List of Weekly Readings

Here is a list of weekly readings for the class discussion groups. For each week, you'll see a description of the reading, and then the corresponding pages in the new translation of Capital. We recommend everyone using the same version so please get the new one (or ask the group for a free pdf, etc).

We expect that all discussion groups will take some weeks off, for a variety of reasons! If you find that most of the regular attendees of your discussion group can't make one week, cancelling is fine. When you meet again, pick up where you left off (don't skip).

You'll see below rough dates for the lectures. Try to get through the readings generally in line with the lecture dates and schedule below.

Section for Reading	Pages in New Translation
March 15: Lecture 1: Class Introduction and Ch 1, Sec 1	n/a
Week 1: 1867 Preface (Preface to the First Edition) and Ch 1, Sec 1 (Read Ch 1, Sec 1-2 paragraph by paragraph and discuss as a group)	Pg. 5-8 Pg. 13-19
Week 2: Ch 1, Sec 2 (Read Ch 1, Sec 1-2 paragraph by paragraph and discuss as a group)	Pg. 19-24
Week 3: Extra Session to finish reading and discussing Ch 1, Sec 1-2 paragraph by paragraph.	finish Pg. 13-24
Week 4: Ch 1, Sec 3 (Value-Form)	Pg. 24-47
Week 5: Ch 1, Sec 4 (Fetish Character of Commodities)	Pg. 47-59
April 19 or 26: Lecture 2: Chapter 1 Review	n/a
Week 6: The Exchange Process	Ch 2: Pg. 60-68
Week 7: Money, or Commodity Circulation I	Ch 3, Parts 1-2: Pg. 69-103

Week 8: Money, or Commodity Circulation II	finish Ch 3: Pg. 103-115 and Part I review.
May 17: Lecture 3: Part I – The Commodity and Money	n/a
Week 9: Part I Review Session (no new reading, or use this week to catch up if you feel behind!)	Catch up or Part I Review
Week 10: The General Formula for Capital and Contradictions in the General Formula	Ch 4: 121-139
Week 11: Buying and Selling Labor-Power and Part II Review	finish Ch 4: 140-152 and Part II Review
early June: Lecture 4: Part II – The Transformation of Money into Capital	n/a
Week 12: The Labor Process and the Valorization Process, and Constant Capital and Variable Capital	Chs 5 and 6: Pg. 153-184
Week 13: The Rate of Surplus-Value	Ch 7: Pg. 185-202
Week 14: The Working Day I	Ch 8, Parts 1-4: Pg. 203-235
Week 15: The Working Day II	Ch 8, Parts 5-7: Pg. 235-272
Week 16: The Rate and Amount of Surplus Value	Ch 9: Pg. 273-284
mid July: Lecture 5: Part III – The Production of Absolute Surplus Value	n/a
Week 17: The Concept of Relative Surplus-Value and Cooperation	Chs 10 and 11: Pg. 285-307
Week 18: The Division of Labor and the Manufacturing System	Ch 12: 308-340

Week 19: Machinery and Large-Scale Industry I	Ch 13, Parts 1-3: Pg. 341-386
Week 20: Machinery and Large-Scale Industry II	Ch 13, Parts 4-7: Pg. 386-420
mid August: Lecture 6: Part IV – The Production of Relative Surplus Value	n/a
Week 21: Machinery and Large-Scale Industry III	Ch 13, Parts 8-10: Pg. 421-464
Week 22: The Production of Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value	Chs 14, 15 and 16: Pg. 465-490
Week 23: How the Value and Price of Labor-Power are Transformed into Wages and Time Wages	Chs 17 and 18: Pg. 491-506
Week 24: Piece Wages and Variations in Wages from Nation to Nation	Chs 19 and 20: Pg. 507-520
mid September: Lecture 7: Part V and IV – Wages and Looking toward the General Law	n/a
Week 25: Simple Reproduction and How Surplus-Value is Transformed into Capital	Chs 21 and 22: Pg. 521-561
Week 26: The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation I	Ch 23, Parts 1-2: Pg. 562-575
Week 27: The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation II	Ch 23, Parts 3-4: Pg. 575-593
Week 28: The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation III	Ch 23, Part 5: Pg. 593-649
late October: Lecture 8: The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation and Primitive Accumulation	n/a
Week 29: The So-Called Original Accumulation I	Ch 24, Parts 1-3: Pg. 650-675

Week 30: The So-Called Original Accumulation II and The Modern Theory of Colonization	Ch 24, Parts 4-7, and Ch 25: Pg. 675-701
mid November: Lecture 9: Capital as a whole, Volume 1 Review and Bringing in V2 and V3.	n/a
Final Session: Discuss whole book and have fun!	n/a

Notes on Hosting

1. Have something to drink available – i.e. pitchers of water, maybe a pot of coffee (decaf if it's late).
2. A lot of us have small apartments, don't let that discourage you! People will figure out how to make it work – put some pillows and blankets on the floor, bring in chairs from another room, etc.
3. Suggestion: try to rotate among group members and have someone bring snacks for each session.
4. Disposables are your friend! If you don't have a dishwasher, use paper and plastic cups for water and coffee. See if someone can buy a bunch for the group. This doesn't need to be hard.