



How to Read a Book

by Mortimer Adler and Charles van Doren



Reasons

- Entertainment
- Information



Questions to ask

- Understanding is the hardest
- What is their book about as a whole
- What is being said in detail, and how?
- Is there book true, in whole or in part?
- What of it?



General reading tips

- Always approach reading as a conversation with the author
- Books are the imperfect creations of imperfect creatures
- Do question and challenge
- Understand what you read before criticizing
- Make every book you read your own
 - Highlighting: Underline, circle, star, asterisk and fold pages
 - Linking: number arguments on the page, reference other pages or sections
 - Synthesizing: write in the margins, top and bottoms of pages and front and endpapers

The 4 levels of reading

Elementary reading

- Turning symbols into information
- Read with appropriate speed**
 - Every book should be read no more slowly than it deserves, and no more quickly than you can read it with satisfaction and comprehension

Inspectional reading

- Getting the most from a book in a given time
- Inspect everybook before reading it
 - It primes you with an overall framework
 - It tells you whether and how to read it
- Part 1
 - Systematic skimming**
 - Study
 - Title
 - Contents
 - Index
 - Publisher's blurb
 - Author's preface
 - Turn pages
 - Read titles, sub-titles, figures and tables
 - Read a paragraph or two, sometimes several pages
 - Skim pivotal chapters in full
 - especially opening and summary statements
 - Read the last two or three pages in the main part of the book
 - Classify the book
 - Non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, fiction?
 - Prose, verse, theater, other or a mix?
 - History, science or philosophy?
 - Theoretical or practical?
 - Write a short synthesis of its contents
 - one to three sentences
 - Bullet the high-level structure
 - Decide whether to read the book or not**
- Part 2
 - Superficial reading**
 - What does it say (Big picture)**
 - Read the whole book, all the way through without stopping

Analytical reading

- Thorough and complete reading for understanding
- Part 1
 - What is the book about as a whole**
 - Classify the book
 - Synthesize it briefly
 - Identify, organize and outline the parts
 - Define the problems the author is trying to solve
- Part 2
 - What is being said in detail and how?**
 - Spot all the keywords and understand what the author means by them
 - Distil the key propositions from the author's most important sentences
 - Find or build the author's arguments from sequences of sentences and
 - Decide which problems the author has, hasn't and knew they couldn't solve.
- Part 3
 - Is the book true, in whole or in part?**
 - Part A
 - General maxims of intellectual etiquette
 - Understand before you "agree", "disagree" or "abstain"
 - Be open-minded and collaborative, even when you disagree and
 - Be specific in any criticisms you make.
 - Part B
 - Make your criticisms specific and detailed
 - Uninformed ? The author does not know something important
 - Misinformed ? The author states something that is incorrect
 - Illogical ? The author's arguments are inconsistent or don't follow
 - Incomplete ? One or more important additional conclusions omitted.

Synoptic reading

- Exploring a subject through wide reading
- Part 1
 - Setting up for synoptic success**
 - Roughly identify the subject you want to tackle
 - Realize more than one book is necessary to tackle it
 - Draw up a long bibliography
 - Systematically skim all the books on your list
 - Solidify the subject you're tackling
 - Shorten your bibliography
- Part 2
 - Reading synoptically**
 - Find the relevant passages
 - Bring the authors to your terms
 - Get the questions clear
 - Define the issues
 - Analyze the discussion