

FREE FIRST CHAPTER

THE INTELLIGENT READER'S GUIDE TO READING

Books In The Digital World

How To Read A Book The Right Way — Chapter One. About a 12-minute read.

Do you know how to read?

You might scorn this question instantly, since, well, you are technically reading it. And you're right to do so if you consider that the inquiry is about your literacy. It is not! This question has so many layers that it deserves to have a whole book written about it. Let us envision this scenario:

You just read the last page of a book, closed it, and a feeling of exhilaration fills you up. You are so excited that you pick up the phone, and call your best friend telling them excitedly, "I have just finished the most brilliant book ever written!" Your friend, who gets thrilled at the sound of your voice, asks, "Really? What's it about?"

Your smile starts to fade as you stumble, trying to create a comprehensible sentence. The ideas of the book are floating in your mind; you remember clearly the instances that mesmerized you. But how do you explain that feeling? How can you relay in words and convince your friend that this is the book of the century?

You start by telling them the ideas. You talk about the way the writer brilliantly described a particular instance. You then remember that for them to understand how powerful that description was, they need to know something else that occurred prior to that. You then try to explain it again with the background information. You suddenly recall an exceptionally well-written paragraph that they must know about. Maybe they'd understand better. You

fumble through the pages of the book as you speak, excitedly trying to look for that part that will help them understand. You start to lose their interest.

"Yeah, that sounds really good, I guess," you'd hear them say unenthusiastically. You feel disappointed, why couldn't they understand? Why couldn't you explain how good it was? You just end up saying, "Well, you should read it; it really is brilliant!"

This happens maybe more often than many of us care to admit. Or maybe, you just finished a book and felt that the writer could have done a better job, but you could not pinpoint the exact reason behind your feeling. In some instances, you might have read about a complex idea or concept and found that it would fit perfectly in a conversation you're having with your coworkers. But you just couldn't explain it well enough to get the conversation going.

Have you always wanted to be an intellectual who understands economics, politics, philosophy, and psychology? Were you ever curious to read and fully understand the theories of Confucius, Immanuel Kant, or Simone de Beauvoir? Do you want to know what the greatest minds of our species thought and created, and you realize that books are the window to take a peek?

Reading isn't only about the ability to decipher words on paper; it surpasses the ability to learn our ABCs. Reading is an art that we need to perfect to make the most of our development, and learn about the world and everything in it. Regardless of what we would like to improve within ourselves, it all starts with our brains. And reading is the exercise of the mind. We read to learn, we read to evolve, and we read to expand our horizons. Does knowing your ABCs suffice to achieve such major goals?

This book was compiled to help readers move beyond reading words and sentences. It takes its readers on a step-by-step journey to help them dissect a book, understand it, and close it with a sense of fulfillment as the concepts and the ideas within are fully comprehended. You should finish reading a book, understand what's within, and end up with a clear opinion of your own regarding the topic it discusses.

This book aims to assist the reader in considering alternative ways of reading other than just opening a book and reading it cover to cover. Even if you aren't specialized in the particular field you are reading about, you do have the intellectual capacities to benefit the most from reading and understanding the main concepts of a book regardless of how difficult they are. You only lack the tools that help you make use of your intellect.

This is a guide that builds up gradually to help you read better. However, it would almost be useless without you taking action on your part. You are a major component of its success in achieving its goal. What you do with the information within is as crucial as the ideas it contains. There will be exercises at the end of each chapter to help you apply the key concepts, which are cumulative as you make progress from one chapter to the next. Reading is a mental exercise, and if the reader does not take action and make the mental effort needed when reading this book, not much use will come out of reading it.

These pages are written by someone who loves to read, and always strives to read better and make the most out of good books they come across. We only hope that you find it an enjoyable read as much as it was a joy to write. If you are ready to make the most out of the books you read, this is a good place to start. So we ask again, would you like to know how to read? Well then, read on.

Why Would I Read?

As Marie is cleaning the house, she sees her twelve-year-old sitting on the couch with his iPad playing games. She sighs as she prefers him to do something more useful and says:

"Just drop that iPad, John, and go pick up a book to read."

"But it's summertime! I can't believe I'm done with school, so why would I read?" complains John.

"Well, reading is fun. Besides, it will be good for you."

"Why would it be? I've had enough reading in school. Why should I read?"

"Well... because... it is good for you!" repeats the mother hesitantly as she tries to think of a more convincing answer.

"Yeah, but why? You all say it is good for me. How is it good for me?"

"Well, you'll be able to gain knowledge that the iPad definitely doesn't have!" she replies confidently.

"But Mom, I have the Internet on the iPad. I can learn anything I want. Why should I read a book?" he replies sarcastically.

Marie knows that her boy is trying to outsmart her to get out of picking up a book and reading. She doesn't know how to convince him that reading is much more useful than going online. She knows that reading is good. But she starts pondering on his questions. Why indeed should he read? And how is it good for him? As she starts considering the questions, she gets angry and replies:

"Fine, suit yourself. But it is your loss, you know!" She goes about doing her chores angrily, thinking more about his questions.

Maybe, just like John and Mary, many of us wonder why it is so important to read. And we might also be wondering if reading is truly necessary. Since you have already picked up a book to read – a book about reading nonetheless – then most probably you believe that reading is important, just like Marie does. But if you're trying to explain why it is important, you might be at a loss too.

Reading In The Digital World

Our age is dubbed the Age of Information, and the Internet has changed numerous aspects of our daily lives. It changed the way we receive information and the way we interact, and it created daily new habits altogether. This difference of opinion between Mary and John can be seen in every household, and it is a difference witnessed in every aspect of our lives, not

just in reading. It might be difficult to imagine if there has been a society at any point in history where we've had such a huge gulf between the young and old*.

When a mother like Mary tries to argue with her twelve-year-old about something such as the importance of reading, this gulf between the different perceptions shines through. And John does have a point, actually. Why read to gain knowledge? We now have the Internet. In that little gadget in our pockets, we have all of the information we might ever need to know. So why take the time to read a book? Besides, come to think of it, if I pick up a novel to read, for instance, what information might I gain? In contrast, I can go online and get way more information in a matter of minutes.

We must here differentiate between two kinds of thinking processes that are at the core of this debate: analytic thought and contemplative thought. Analytic thought is goal-directed and transitive. When thinking analytically, the information we seek is the means and the building blocks toward explaining something. And the Internet, which can compile and categorize data, is a powerful tool for such an end goal, no doubt.

Contemplative thinking, on the other hand, is in its nature, experiential and intransitive. The end goal of thinking contemplatively is reflection, and it is used as a means of experimenting and refining our relation to the world. When we contemplate, we are pursuing the satisfaction of being illuminated and gaining new insight. Gaining information in contemplative thinking is the mere context and not the end goal. When you take the time to read a book, you contemplate what it says, gain insight, and understand more about the world. Information happens to come along with the experience.

Analysis and contemplation are two opposite kinds of thinking. Depending on how they are used, the Internet and the book have also become opposites in this sense*. Of course, the Internet can be used to gain insight and think contemplatively about a certain idea or concept. Likewise, a book can be misused and misread or read lightly for the sake of information only. This is why the main purpose of this book is not only to understand why we need to read, but to read to enhance our understanding further, and to re-learn how to read well.

In 2010, a Pew Research survey of hundreds of prominent thinkers was conducted. Almost 80% of them agreed that by 2020, human intelligence would be enhanced because of the unprecedented access to the information we now have on the internet. Fast forward to today, it can be seen that we didn't get any smarter nor are we making better choices*. So what happened? And most importantly, how can reading help us enhance our intelligence?

Making Better Choices

Let us first examine what human intelligence is to try and understand how the plethora of information we now have access to did not enhance intelligence. By definition, human intelligence is our mental ability to reason, solve problems, and learn. It integrates several cognitive functions including our perception, memory, attention, and language*. Obviously, such cognitive functions, or at least one of them, need to be improved to enhance human intelligence further.

So what happened during this decade when almost most humans had online access? Many studies have been conducted about the negative effects of the Internet throughout this past decade. First, using the Internet has, in fact, reduced our short-term memory because our brains are learning that we do not need to remember anything. We can, at any time, access the information and google anything we want, so there is no need for us to remember. This phenomenon is dubbed the "Google Effect"*.

Additionally, the Internet, being highly condensed with information and stimuli, has given rise to "cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning"*. So technically, plenty of our cognitive functions are decreasing with extensive Internet usage. However, one cannot ignore the importance of the Internet, which does, in fact, contain everything humans have known, nor can we disregard its necessity in our daily lives. So how can we make better choices and ultimately enhance human intelligence to counter such effects on our cognitions?

The Basis Of Our Evolution

For centuries, and for as long as writing has existed, reading has helped us pass along information from one generation to the next. It would have been practically impossible to make any advance in science, medicine, or any other field if it wasn't for reading.

By reading what has been discovered earlier, we can continue to evolve. When someone writes down what they discovered, and everyone else can read it, someone out there will add to it. And the circle continues and still does up until now. With reading, we have managed to evolve as a species.

We have already mentioned the two different kinds of thinking. Whoever contributed to our evolution as humans in any field definitely had analytical thinking. They saw a problem and worked towards solving it. However, there is no new knowledge; everything anyone has come up with was at least partly based on previous knowledge. This is why any research conducted and deemed trustworthy begins with a literature review section. Reviewing past literature about the subject of any problem one is trying to solve is the backbone of any research. It is the anchor onto which new ideas are attached*.

So our evolution as humans needed, and still does need, analytic thinkers who read. So technically, contemplative thinking is a prerequisite to analytical thinking. If we want to make good use of a powerful tool like the Internet, which provides us with the means to think analytically, we first need to step back and learn to think contemplatively. And our minds can be trained to do so by reading books.

Weigh And Consider

No one is born with an opinion, but as we grow up, we start forming our ideas and thoughts. As we become more conscious about the world around us, we start to learn more about our own interests and form our own opinions. This is what allows us to make choices and decisions, and this is what actually requires analytical thinking. But how do we make up our minds about things? How do we form our opinions in the first place?

This is where reading comes in. So why read? We read to strengthen ourselves and to fortify those interests we are discovering about ourselves. We read to create the "literature review" of our life experiences and thoughts. As social species, we read what others have thought and experienced, what others have discovered, and what conclusions others have drawn, forming an opinion of our own. And just like Sir Francis Bacon once wrote, we read "to weigh and consider"*.

To weigh and consider what is being read, we need to read contemplatively. This leads us to actually gain the information – and not just access it – which ultimately helps us form our opinions. And this is when analytical thinking should start, with the information we have gained as the means to solve an issue.

If we think back to the cognitive functions of human intelligence, we find that all can be improved easily by reading. First, our language definitely gets better with the more reading we do. When reading contemplatively, our attention and concentration increase, which can in turn help with our memory functions. And last but not least, our whole perception can change and be enhanced when coming face-to-face with new ideas to think about, consider, and contemplate.

Separate The Wheat From The Chaff

Many things on the Internet are useless – just like many books aren't really worth reading. Another skill we need to read better is critical thinking. It will help us choose what we read. The American Philosophical Association has come to a consensus about the portrait of "the ideal critical thinker" as someone who is*:

- Inquisitive in nature
- Well-informed
- Trustful of reason
- Open-minded
- Flexible
- Fair-minded in evaluation
- Honest in facing personal biases
- Prudent in making judgments

- Willing to reconsider
- Clear about issues
- Orderly in complex matters
- Diligent in seeking relevant information
- Reasonable in the selection of criteria
- Focused on inquiry
- Persistent in seeking results

As someone who is willing to learn to read better, make better choices, and further enhance their intelligence, we need to check off every criterion on this list. Critical thinking is needed in every aspect of life, and not just reading. It helps us make better choices in both our personal and professional lives.

But how can we use those skills off of this checklist to make better choices? How can we better choose what we read, whether online or off a bookshelf? If knowledge is simply a set of information, then we can take everything we read at face value. But in fact, knowledge also entails the interpretation of this information.

A critical reader rarely questions the facts but assesses the quality of what is written by interpreting how they are stated. They interpret whether there is enough evidence to support a claim that is made, whether there is another possible interpretation that wasn't considered, and whether the author has taken into consideration how their interpretation applies to other cases*.

In order to choose better what to read, there are several principles we should consider*:

- The credibility of the person or source
- The circumstance or context in which the claim is made
- The justification made in support of that claim
- The nature of the claim itself
- The corroboration from other sources

Whatever we encounter, whatever book or article we wish to read, we usually consider if we like it or not based on our taste, which is totally feasible. But we also need to consider those

five principles and make a critical judgment of whether it is worthy of our time or not in the first place.

Action Steps

Taking into consideration the five principles of critical reading, read through the two articles suggested below and try to make a critical choice of which one would be more beneficial for you to read. Both articles tackle a similar main topic.

Article A – Bloomberg hits the jackpot: NYC students can't read, write, or do arithmetic*

Article B – How New York City Is Working to Improve Students' Social-Emotional Learning*

After going over the articles, try to answer the below questions:

1. Which article is worthy of your time to read and why?
2. How did you come up with the conclusion?
3. Identify instances where you felt one of the articles isn't convincing you with the claims it is making.
4. Which information that you have taken from the articles do you deem trustworthy? Why?

Now that we know why reading is necessary in the digital world and the importance of thinking critically in making our choices, many questions remain. How can we read contemplatively? And how can we read better to ultimately enhance our human intelligence? This is what the book is about: learning to read better, understand better, and think better about what we read.

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