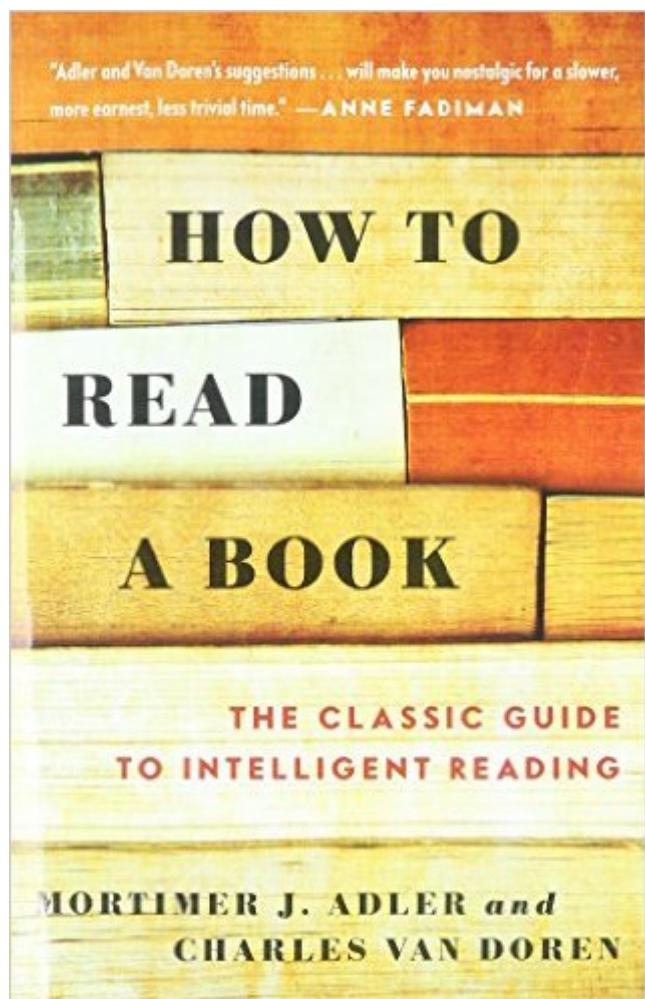


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# How To Read A Book: The Classic Guide To Intelligent Reading (A Touchstone Book)



## **Synopsis**

With half a million copies in print, *How to Read a Book* is the best and most successful guide to reading comprehension for the general reader, completely rewritten and updated with new material. Originally published in 1940, this book is a rare phenomenon, a living classic that introduces and elucidates the various levels of reading and how to achieve them: "from elementary reading, through systematic skimming and inspectional reading, to speed reading. Readers will learn when and how to judge a book by its cover, and also how to X-ray it, read critically, and extract the author's message from the text. Also included is instruction in the different techniques that work best for reading particular genres, such as practical books, imaginative literature, plays, poetry, history, science and mathematics, philosophy and social science works. Finally, the authors offer a recommended reading list and supply reading tests you can use measure your own progress in reading skills, comprehension, and speed.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested" (Francis Bacon). This is one of those books. *How to Read a Book* is a classic guide to intelligent reading and my opinion is that it should be standard reading, particularly for the college-bound student. Don't let the title fool you. This book is not a simplistic review of what you learned in the second grade. The book is divided into four parts. Part one includes what Adler calls the first two

levels of reading: elementary and inspectional reading. In total he sets forth four levels of reading: elementary reading, inspectional reading, analytical reading and syntopical reading. He proceeds to tell us that reading is an active process since the teacher is not available to deliberate. In keeping with this activity we are told how to read faster while comprehending more, how to find answers to our questions from within the book and how to make the right kind of notes in the book. Part two contains the third level of reading: analytical reading. "Reading a book analytically is chewing and digesting it" (p.19). We now learn how to determine the type of literature we are reading, what type of structure it has and we learn that we must come to grasp with the author's vocabulary. The point of all this is to understand the message of the author. If we are unable to state the author's message concisely in our own terms, we have learned nothing. Only after we first understand what the author is saying, can we begin criticize him fairly. Once we have read analytically, we can agree with the author, disagree with him or we can postpone judgment until we have learned more if we wish. Adler suggests that we do not consult other study helps until we first have read the book analytically. This will deaden our ability to read and think for ourselves as well as confuse the message of the author. Part three tells us how to read different types of literature including practical books, imaginative literature, stories, plays, poems, history, philosophy, science, mathematics and social science. Each type of literature has its own vocabulary, propositions, arguments, and questions that must be asked of it. This section is particularly helpful in applying the basic rules of reading to the type of literature that is to be read. The final part of the book is dedicated to the ultimate goals of reading. The first goal is the fourth and final level of reading: syntopical reading. Syntopical reading is the reading of different works on the same subject with a view to constituting a general view on the subject. The idea is to read a number of books on a given subject, as objectively as possible, and withhold judgment and criticism of all the books until you understand the different perspectives. This is the bread and butter of research and is the best way to understand any given subject matter, which is why this book is vital to the college student as well as anyone with academic pursuits. This is also the way to become educated as opposed to being indoctrinated. The last of the two ultimate goals of reading is to expand your mind for further understanding. Your mind is like a rubber band in that when it is stretched, it never fully returns to its original shape. I found this book to be highly organized and thoroughly outlined. The back even contains two appendices with a list of recommended books and exercises at the four levels of reading. It is essentially a "how to" book therefore its contents are very practical and immediately helpful.

As a book reviewer for the past 20 years, with hundreds of reviews in print and electronic media, I think I know a little about reading books. I was fascinated to find that Adler and Van Doren have, in **HOW TO READ A BOOK**, clearly articulated what I had discovered on my own. Most people read at an elementary level. Common print media -- newspapers, magazines -- are geared to this first level, that of eighth or ninth grade. Reading at this level is simple and unsophisticated. It is a fairly simple procedure. As someone once said, "You just pick up a book and look at every word until you've seen them all." The second level of reading is **inspectional**. Two steps are performed simultaneously. The reader skims, or pre-reads, by studying the title page, preface, table of contents, index, dust jacket and a chapter or two. He thumbs through the book, reading a bit here and there. Then he reads the entire book superficially without bothering whether he understands it or not. I might argue that if you don't understand what you're reading, you're not reading at all. However, this is the kind of reading I do when I'm selecting a book to review. It is just the beginning. Adler and Van Doren argue that this kind of superficial reading can prepare a reader for enjoying more difficult works. "The tremendous pleasure that can come from reading Shakespeare, for example, was spoiled for generations of high school students who were forced to go through 'Julius Caesar,' 'As You Like It,' or 'Hamlet' scene by scene, looking up all the strange words in a glossary and studying all the footnotes," write the authors. "As a result, they never read a Shakespeare play. By the time they reached the end, they had forgotten the beginning and lost sight of the whole... They should have been encouraged to read the play at one sitting and discuss what they got out of that first quick reading. Only then would they have been ready to study the play carefully and closely because then they would have understood enough of it to learn more." The book describes how to be an active reader. A clue for the average reader: Active readers don't go to sleep over books. The third level of reading is **analytical** reading, which is what book reviewers do. The reader classifies the book, reads it carefully, determines the author's message and evaluates how well it's presented and compares it to comparable works. Adler and Van Doren cover subjects like classifying books, x-raying them, determining the author's message, how to criticize a book fairly, and the role of relevant experience in reading. They then go on to describe the different approaches to various kinds of reading -- practical books, imaginative literature, plays, stories, poems, history, science, mathematics, social sciences, and philosophy. The highest level of reading, **synoptical** reading, is the reading of several books on a particular subject. They describe how to select a bibliography (which I found truly useful), how to narrow the subject, how to inspect the material. The five steps of synoptical reading are included in this chapter. Reading is a search for truth, and truth can be found only through thoughtful comparison and discussion. "The truth then, insofar as it can be found -- the solution to

the problem, insofar as that is available to us -- consists rather in the ordered discussion itself than in any set of propositions or assertions about it...thus, in order to present this truth to our minds -- and to the minds of others -- we have to do more than merely ask and answer the questions. We have to ask them in a certain order, and be able to defend that order."Sunnye Tiedemann (aka Ruth F. Tiedemann)

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