

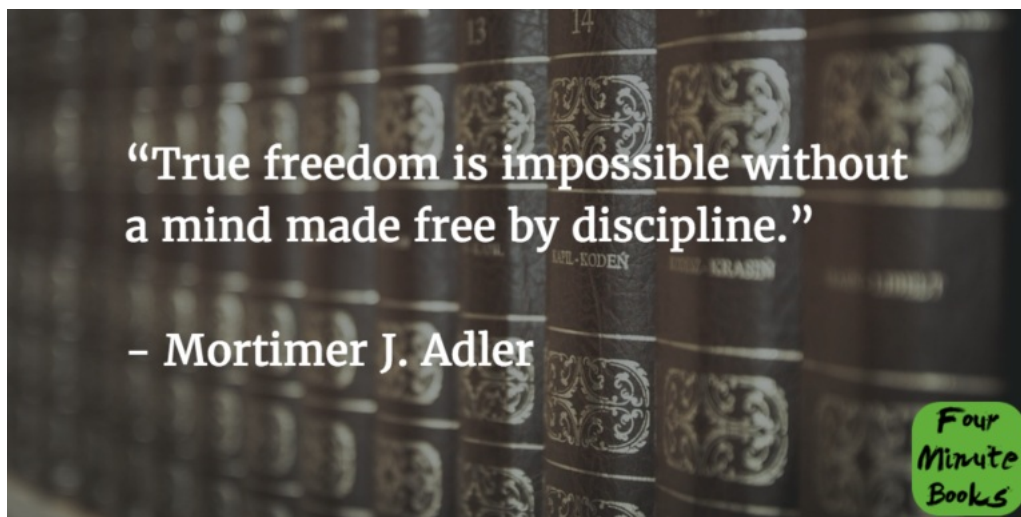
How To Read A Book Summary

 fourminutebooks.com/how-to-read-a-book-summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *How To Read A Book* is a 1940 classic teaching you how to become a more active reader and deliberately practice the various stages of reading, in order to maximize the value you get from books.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Mortimer J. Adler was a popular American philosopher, author and educator, who worked at various prestigious universities, like Columbia and the University of Chicago, as well as educational institutions, like the Encyclopædia Britannica, and his own Institute for Philosophical Research. When he died in 2001 (aged exactly 98 and a half years old), he left behind a massive body of work in service of making philosophy more accessible to the masses.

One of his most popular pieces is *How To Read A Book*, which teaches you how to get the most out of reading non-fiction, for example when you have to for school, work, or just plain want to get smarter. It dissects reading into its various stages and shows you how to think about information critically.

Here are my 3 main takeaways from the book:

1. Always inspect books before you read them.
2. Analyze a book's main theme and the author's intentions to get the big picture.
3. Question every book's importance and logic.

Do you want to hone your reading skill so you'll get more out of every future book you read? Let's get to it!

Lesson 1: Do an inspectional read every time you want to pick up a new book.

Most people want to save time on books by learning how to speed read. I always tell them not to. To be okay with reading slowly. The one thing I've learned about saving time on books is that it doesn't happen while reading. **Where you save time is in deciding what you'll read in the first place.**

Sadly, a lot of non-fiction books don't really warrant being read from cover to cover, and this is where what Mortimer J. Adler calls inspectional reading comes in.

The goal of an inspectional read is to answer two questions:

1. **What is this book about?**
2. **What kind of book is this?**

You can do this by skim-reading the following sections:

1. The title page.
2. The editor's blurb.
3. The cover text.
4. The table of contents.
5. Introductory sections and important paragraphs of chapters that interest you.

After you've done that, you'll have a pretty good idea of whether this book deserves your full attention. If you do decide to read it cover to cover, read it entirely, but *don't look up things you don't understand*. This is what slows you down and makes a book painful to get through. Even without understanding everything, knowing what the entirety of the text is about will help you dig deeper into these things later.

Lesson 2: Try to find the main theme and author's intentions by analyzing a book in detail.

This is where analytical reading comes in. Once you've read the book, you can really analyze it. This is where taking notes, highlighting, summarizing and thinking long and hard about the content become your tools of the trade.

First, you should answer this question: **"What was the author's aim when he or she decided to write a book with this title?"**

Looking at the title will not only make it dead-simple for you to categorize the book, for example into maths, history, how-to or self-help, but remembering the main goal of the book will later help you connect complex ideas back to the overarching theme.

Then, you can go on to **unravel the book's main theme**, by trying to summarize its content in a few sentences and writing down all the different themes and sub-plots. It'll help a lot to create a mindmap of how those relate to each other, so you can see how the

various parts of the book relate to each other and the whole.

For example, A Christmas Carol is set in five staves. You could summarize it briefly by saying first, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former business partner and warned about his future. Then, he's shown the past, present and future by three ghosts, which causes him to change and go from greedy miser to generous giver.

In an x-ray, this plot would resemble the bones of the book, whereas the exact structure, potential sub-plots and other, recurring themes would be more like the book's flesh. Important too, but useless if you don't know what's going on underneath.

Lesson 3: Ask more questions about books, critically thinking about their importance and logic.

Inspectional and analytical reading help you read more selectively and to understand what you read better. However, the most important lesson about reading books in general, I think, is this: **Always question a book's significance and logic.**

Even if you select well, it does you no good to remember the content of a book that's irrelevant, and even if you've understood everything correctly, that means nothing if the book's logic is inherently flawed.

After you close and put down a book, ask these two things:

1. **"Is this true?"** and if it is,
2. **"So what?"**

Checking the book's logic should come first, because if it doesn't hold up, it's obviously irrelevant. You can do that by checking if there are contradictory statements at different points in the book, if arguments are left incomplete, or if the book somehow fails to answer the main questions it poses.

Then, you can go on to criticize the book, but only if you've understood it well and aren't emotional about it. For example, just today someone who's vegan said my critic review of a book about a vegan diet was opinionated – which is of course an opinionated statement in itself, since he obviously felt emotionally offended by my review – not a good basis for judgement.

Don't disagree on principle and don't agree because it "feels right" – make up your own, objective mind, and then decide.

How To Read A Book Review

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why reading is like playing baseball
- How complex elementary reading really is
- What an author's job really is and how you can understand them better
- Some examples of books that had flawed logic
- How to master syntopical reading, the highest level of it
- Why there's no way around using common sense while reading

Who would I recommend the How To Read A Book summary to?

The 14 year old, who now has to read Shakespeare in school and hates it, the 33 year old book nerd, who feels obligated to finish a book once she starts it, and anyone who usually thinks every book they read is the "best one ever" after they finish it.