

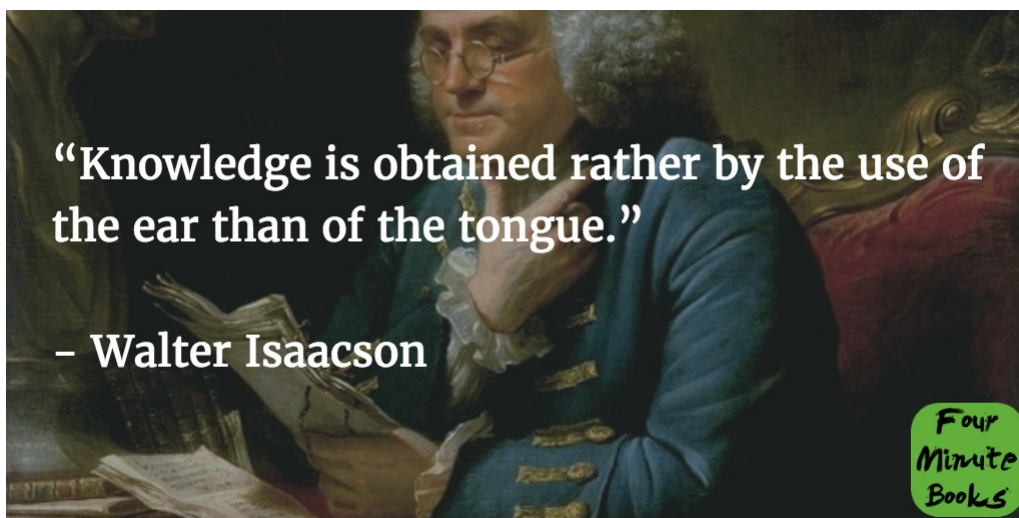
# Benjamin Franklin: An American Life Summary

 [fourminutebooks.com/benjamin-franklin-an-american-life-summary/](https://fourminutebooks.com/benjamin-franklin-an-american-life-summary/)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* takes a thorough look at the life of one of the most influential humans that ever lived and explains how he could achieve such greatness in so many different fields and areas.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Pro book tip: When you see a biography of an iconic, historic figure, written by Walter Isaacson, just get it. They're always worth it. Especially if you read a couple by the same author, you'll notice that even among the most shimmering characters in history, there are stark differences.

For example, while most of them are known for specifically changing one industry or field, like Einstein did with physics, Marcus Aurelius did with philosophy and Nelson Mandela did with equality, some people you keep bumping into in totally unrelated areas.

Benjamin Franklin is one of those. He's referenced in books about innovation, deliberate practice and money, just to name a few. But of course you also know him for being a great businessman, writer, shaping the founding of the United States and oh, discovering electricity.

What makes someone change the content of history books in so many different areas? From Benjamin Franklin: An American Life, I believe it's these 3 things:

1. Benjamin Franklin was a self-improvement nerd.
2. If you really want to learn something, you'll find a way.
3. Don't be afraid to be 20 years ahead of your time.

Ready for a deep dive into one of history's most fascinating biographies? Let's learn something from Ben Franklin's life!

## Lesson 1: Above all, Benjamin Franklin embraced learning. He was a true self-improvement nerd.

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Ben Franklin started learning early. At just ten years old, he took his first apprenticeship and worked ever since. So by the time he took a job with printer Samuel Keimer at age 17, he'd been learning for seven years already.

But picking an industry and committing to learning the tools of the trade is just one part of the equation. **He was also hell bent on improving personally, a trait which, I think, has allowed him to confidently switch topics.**

Having taken the job to further improve his writing skills, he eventually ended up staying because of the long, philosophical discussions he had with Samuel (which had a great influence on his later debating and speaking ability). To integrate learning into every single day, he even created a 5-hour rule for himself, spending one hour each weekday on reading, writing, setting goals, coming up with ideas, talking with like-minded people and reflecting.

One of the books that most impacted him is called The Pilgrim's Progress, a religious story outlining the Christian journey in the form of a dream.

You could say that Benjamin Franklin was one of the first self-improvement nerds, loving to learn and obsessing about making consistent progress with his life, just like you and me 😊

## Lesson 2: If it was possible in the 1700s, it's possible in 2016. If you really want to learn something, you'll find a way.

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For all his success in business, what Ben Franklin *really* wanted to do was write. That's why he took an apprenticeship with a printer in the first place. He also worked at the New England Courant, the first, independent Boston newspaper, which belonged to his brother.

Of course the only way to get better at writing is to get feedback for it, so he was eager to publish some of his essays in the newspaper, but since he was 17 years old, nobody would've taken him seriously. **So instead, he created a female alter ego, Mrs. Silence Dogood, in whose name he published his funny first attempts at writing.**

Sure, having access to a newspaper isn't something everyone can count on, but if Ben Franklin found a way to really learn how to write in 1721, so can you in 2016. Even better, today, you can publish almost anything online, free for the world to see – whether that's a video, a song or something you've written.

"I don't have a publisher/agent/film school education" aren't valid excuses any more. If you really want to learn, you'll find a way. If not, you'll find an excuse.

## Lesson 3: Don't let being ahead of your time get to you. Embrace it and be patient.

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No matter what you want to learn and eventually be successful in, it's always going to entail some kind of risk, whether it means putting all of your money into a new technology, sticking with your opinion, even if it's unpopular, or pursuing something that other people tell you will never work.

This means you'll often feel like you know something to be true and the world simply hasn't caught up yet. It's easy to get discouraged when you feel you're the only one who's ahead of the curve, frustrating even and maybe you'll want to give up. **As long as you think you're right – don't.**

Benjamin Franklin was at least 20, sometimes dozens of years ahead of his time, but he still knew that eventually, people would come around.

For example he not only discovered electricity with his favorite key-on-a-kite-experiment, he was also the first to store electricity from a lightning strike in a so-called Leyden jar, some of which he connected and called a "battery." A battery! In the 1750s!

He also already lined out a government model for the united colonies that would later become the USA in the 1750s, 20 years before the actual declaration of independence.

Until the very end, he kept up his visionary thinking, putting forward a petition in 1790, the year he died, stating the US government had to "uphold the liberty of the American people, without distinction of color" – he wanted to abolish slavery – something that would actually happen 75 years later.

## My personal take-aways

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I love biographies. The facts aren't just lined out, they're woven into the story of another human life, which is always the most compelling way to get the point across. Ben Franklin is an especially interesting example, because he changed not one, but many fields in his lifetime. *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* is a must read!

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why Benjamin's father didn't set him up for a career in church, like he intended to
- What other books influenced him
- How he started an army by accident
- Which crucial piece of every modern house he invented (and what nickname that got him with his enemies)
- The story of his intervention in politics
- When he changed his mind about the US revolution
- Which key line of the Declaration of Independence he changed
- How he helped make sure the US would actually become a country

- The political model he invented that's still used to govern the US today

## **Who would I recommend the Benjamin Franklin: An American Life summary to?**

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The 17 year old who thinks she might be weird for sticking her nose into books rather than shot glasses, the 33 year old would-be writer, who feels he needs to sign a book contract before he can start writing, and anyone who thinks they're ahead of their time.