

# HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE READING HABIT IN 2021

RESOURCES AND TIPS YOU CAN  
IMMEDIATELY APPLY TO LEVEL UP  
YOUR READING!

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**Reading is unquestionably good for you, but, reading regularly and effectively is difficult.**

From deciding what to read, understanding and retaining what you've read and doing it regularly, there are many pitfalls that make turning on Netflix much easier.

Although this is far from a definitive guide, we've put together a list of resources that have worked for us over the years in building our own effective reading habits and we hope this gives you some inspiration when building yours!

**We've broken this guide down into what we consider to be the key components...**

# SELECTION

It sounds obvious, but the most important factor when building an effective reading habit is to choose great books in the first place!

With limited time to read, anything you can do to increase the quality and interest-level of the books you choose will have a big impact on the effectiveness of your reading, as well as your motivation.

There is a lot of information out there, so finding the right books is a challenge.

**The key is to find trusted sources of recommendations.**

**Some of our favourite starting points include...**

- [Bill Gates' Holiday Reading](#)
- [Barack Obama's Summer Reading](#)
- [The Financial Times Business Book Awards](#)
- [The New York Times Book Recommendations](#)
- [Time Magazine Best Non Fiction](#)
- [Paperback Travels \(that's what we're here for!\)](#)





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## **Find podcasts and Youtube channels on the topics that you're passionate about**

They are a great source of knowledge, and they often lead to recommendations of the most important books related to a topic, including 'entry-point' books that will introduce a subject as well as more advanced books that help you build upon your existing knowledge.

Some of our favourites include...

### **The Ezra Klein Podcast**

A brilliant and intelligent take on current affairs and politics in the US from the founder of Vox in which he interviews a range of experts on various topics. Always ends by asking his guests for three books they would recommend.

### **The Rich Roll Podcast**

An inspirational listen from one of the leading podcasters around and a source of a great many book recommendations.

### **The Tim Ferris Podcast**

Wide-ranging interviews from the author of The Four Hour Work Week.

## Create your own recommendation threshold

I have a friend who follows a rule that if three people independently recommend a book to him, he has to read it.

Simple yet effective, as it also leads to lots of conversations about books. Which leads to the next point...

## Make a point of asking people you admire about their favourite books.

We set up our [My Life in Books interview series](#) on Paperback Travels for this very reason.

## Go to real bookshops as much as possible and browse the curated books sections.

It's easy to forget about real book shops with internet shopping ubiquitous, but the best book shops are packed with qualified recommendations and opportunities for serendipitous discovery of books you wouldn't otherwise have heard about (and we don't mean go to real bookshops and then buy the books on Amazon...).





# ROUTINE

**Sticking to a reading routine is an extremely powerful way of building reading momentum. Even ten minutes of reading each day mounts up over time.**

Reading a little bit, but often, takes the pressure off from feeling like you should be reading and leads to more situations where you find yourself reading for long periods of time as a book suddenly captures your interest.

## Learn about the science of habits

Funnily enough, there are some brilliant books dedicated to this topic! Here are three that will help you build effective habits:

[Atomic Habits by James Clear](#)

[The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg](#)

[Daily Rituals by Mason Currey](#)

## Read something every day

Ideally, choose a time each day (perhaps when you wake up or as soon as you've finished work) and commit to spending a manageable amount of time reading. Start small, and gradually build this up over time within reason.

From our personal experience, we do not recommend allocating time right at the end of your day.

## Consider different mediums for different situations

**Physical books.** Probably my favourite reading medium when I can get hold of the physical version of a book. I mostly read physical books at home or on holiday.

**Kindle/E-reader.** As a long-term expat, my Kindle has changed my reading life by making it possible to get hold of books that I would previously have needed to get delivered internationally or wait until I visited the UK to buy.

Also ideal for holidays where carrying all the books you want to read (and having to decide which ones in advance!) is prohibitive. Kindles are also perfect when you hear about a great book to read next and you want to get your hands on it immediately.

**Audiobooks.** They've been around for decades but I am a relatively recent convert to listening to books (except for epic car journeys on holiday as a child listening to The Hobbit). Perfect for multitasking while going for walks, cleaning, commuting. Which brings me to the next point...

## Ruthlessly seek out pockets of time for reading

If you're struggling for time to read, consider regular activities that don't need your full mental attention, such as doing the washing up or commuting to work. This is where audiobooks come into their own.





# RETENTION

**Do you ever read and enjoy a book, only to realise a few months later that you don't remember enough about it to describe the main concepts and ideas to someone else?**

This is normal, but there are ways to improve reading retention.

## Take notes

There are whole books and methodologies related to note taking, which we won't go into here, but simply writing something down while reading forces you to process the content and identify what you think about it (and whether you understand it!).

I've found this particularly helpful when reading about difficult concepts like statistics. The trick is not to try to write down everything, but enough that if you browse your notes after reading the book, you will remember and understand the key arguments/concepts.

## Attempt to write a short summary of the book when you've finished reading it.

This is not easy but it not only forces you to think deeply about what you've read but, once you are in the habit, you will notice yourself reading more carefully, knowing that you want to be able to summarise it afterwards.

## **Read reviews and summaries after finishing a book.**

There are many intelligent people all over the internet reading the same books as you and sharing their understanding and insights online.

Search for articles about a specific book on Medium, for example, and you will find a wealth of reactions that will reinforce the information you have already digested by reading the book yourself.

## **Read books twice**

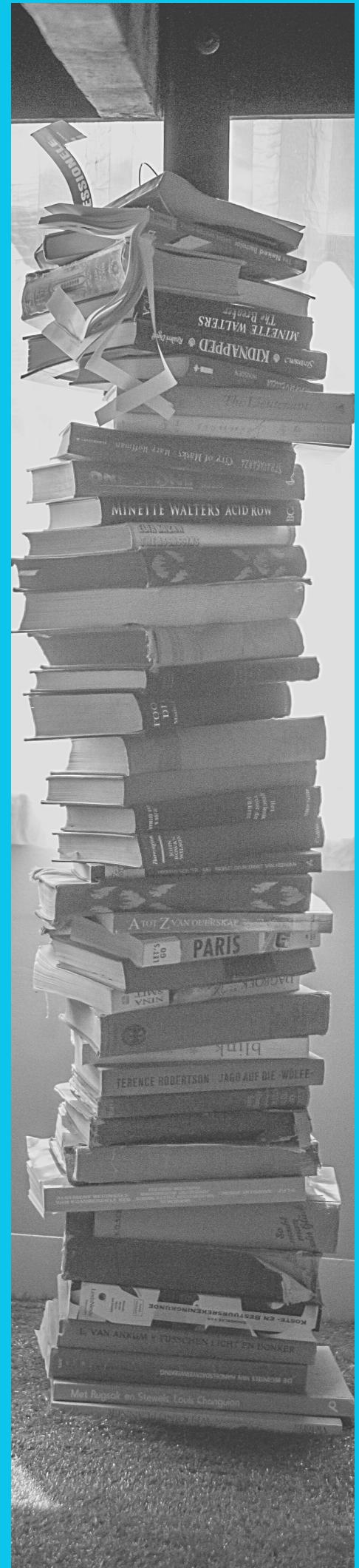
This is a guide to building an effective reading habit and yet we're suggesting you read books more than once?!

Stay with me here. Reading a book more than once allows you to pick up on details you missed the first time and reinforce your understanding of the main concepts.

I've also found that reading a book again when I know more about the topic in question helps me to appreciate the content in ways for which I hadn't previously been ready.

## **Don't worry about retention TOO much**

You're not going to remember everything and nor should you need to. Sometimes it's more helpful to think of reading as a way of gradually building a foundation of context that helps the next book make sense, and then the next.



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## About Paperback Travels

Paperback Travels is a celebration of non-fiction books and their power to educate, inspire and challenge their readers.

If you're interested in discovering new books to add to your reading list, or learning about the reading habits of inspirational people, we hope you will enjoy visiting our site regularly to read our latest books summaries, interviews and deep dive articles.

James and Adam

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