How to Read an Entire Book in a Single Day

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You've been putting off reading that book for weeks, and you're supposed to have read it all by tomorrow. Whether you're cramming for school, or trying to avoid looking like a lazy bum in your book club, don't lose hope. You can power through that tome without forgetting everything and coming away with nothing.

Reading an entire book in a matter of hours may seem daunting, but it all comes down to simple math. The average adult reads around 200-400 words per minute. The average novel ranges between 60,000 and 100,000 words total. If your reading speed is right in the middle of the pack at 300 words per minute, and you're reading a middle-of-the-pack novel at around 80,000 words, you'll be able to knock it out in around five hours or less.

That might seem like a lot, but it's totally possible. And you can do it without any skimming or speed reading trickery, which can be bad when it comes to truly absorbing information. For the most part, it's possible to read at your usual pace, absorb information at your brain's preferred rate, and all you have to do is buckle down, make the time, and get started as soon as possible.

Find the Perfect Reading Location

Distraction is your enemy. Anything that can pull your attention away from your book is going to increase the amount of time you need to finish. The internet, sounds, screens, games, pets, toys, friends, and random people you don't know are all trying to pull you away from those words. Even as I write this, sitting in the airport, I'm constantly catching myself people watching and losing focus.

Separate yourself from everything. Lock yourself in a room with a pair of earplugs, go to the most uninhabited spot in your library, throw down a blanket in a low-traffic section of the park. Heck, if you have no other

place to go, hide away in your car (as long as it's not too hot). Think of how much solitude you'll need, then double it. If you can't get away from distracting sounds, reach for a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, or do what Emerson Spartz, owner and operator of the Harry Potter fan site Mugglenet, suggests and listen to white noise. According to Spartz finds that listening to white noise helps him keep focused, and even helps him read a little faster.

You also want to be somewhere that's comfortable enough that it won't distract you, but not so comfortable you'll fall asleep. Read at a table instead of your bed, or choose a chair over that comfy couch. Comfortable furniture is great for reading on, but you're not reading for pleasure right now—you're reading to get it done. If you're reading at night, it's important you avoid what Thomas Frank of College Info Geek describes as "the call of the pillow." When you're near (or on) your bed, recliner, or couch, you'll be tempted to check out for a nap. If you can, go somewhere that isn't an option and do go back until you're finished.

Read In Intervals and Keep Active

You may be in crunch time, but you still only have so much willpower to dedicate to a single task. When you focus on one task for too long, you experience ego depletion, which is your mental energy, self-control, and willpower being wiped out. If you don't take regular breaks, your motivation to keep reading will all but disappear, and that will mean game over for you. So, unless your book is utterly captivating, you'll eventually be sick of reading it, and you'll need to mix things up.

Set a timer and read for 20 minutes, then do something active to keep yourself energized for 5-10 minutes. Think of it as the pomodoro method for reading. I go for walks, do my daily exercises, play a video game, or just blast some music and rock out for a little bit. Whatever you decide to do, make it active, involved, and ideally have nothing to do with the subject you're reading about. The point is to give yourself a break so you can come back and feel refreshed.

You can also try breaking your book up into segments instead of timing yourself. Mark your reading intervals with bookmarks or by noting a certain percentage. For example, you can stick three bookmarks in your book to separate it into four chunks of reading. Once you reach one of the bookmarks, you can reward yourself with something like a special snack, some video game time, or an episode of the show you're currently obsessed with.

Take Notes on Everything

Staying active can help you keep focused while you're reading too. Taking notes on what you've read, or highlighting passages you want to remember later can break up the monotony and help you better retain the information. Note everything! Words you don't know, the things you read between the lines, character motivations, thoughts, and even how you feel emotionally about major plot points.

Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, the authors of *How to Read a Book*, suggest you write an analytical book review that follows these four rules once you've finished reading:

1. Classify the book according to subject matter.
2. State what the whole book is about. Be as brief as possible.
3. List the major parts in order and relation. Outline these parts as you have outlined the whole.
4. Define the problem or problems the author is trying to solve.

If you write it all down now while it's fresh in your mind, you won't have to try and remember later when your memory is fuzzy. Come discussion or essay time, you might have a few pages outlining your exact thoughts already.

If you have time to dig even deeper, take some time to expand on your notes. You can do this after you've finished, or even during your reading interval breaks. Look up definitions for words you not sure you understood, revisit the plot points that stood out to you, and go searching online or in other texts for clarification on what you don't understand. You can even compare your notes with SparkNotes and

CliffsNotes to see what you may have missed. It's not ideal to rely on those sources for everything, but it can help fill in the gaps when you power through a book quickly.

Fuel Your Reading Marathon the Right Way

It may seem like a mellow affair, but a reading marathon will wear you out. At some point even the active things you're doing in between reading intervals won't keep you going at full speed. Enter everyone's favorite drug, caffeine. Downing a caffeinated beverage may not seem like much of a tip, but there's a right and wrong way to do it. Here are some things you may want to avoid when it comes to caffeinated beverages:

- **Don't start your reading marathon with a caffeinated beverage**, unless you absolutely feel like you must. Save it for when you really start to drag and need a pick me up. It's like a race in the "critically-acclaimed" film *The Fast and the Furious*: if you hit the nitrous too early, you'll crash and you won't win this race.
- **Don't go for a caffeinated beverage you can drink almost instantly** (5-Hour Energy, Starbucks Doubleshot, etc.). These will pump you up, oh yes, but it will hit you all at once. It's better to have something to sip that will gradually introduce caffeine into your system over time. You're not trying to blast off into space, you're just trying to keep focused and your energy up.
- **Don't drink something that has a bunch of sugar in it**. A little sugar in your coffee for taste is okay, but some of the fancier drinks have a ton of sugar in them. Returning to my fast and furious analogy, keep the sugar out of your gas tank. Sugar will liven you up for a bit, but you'll crash even harder when both the caffeine and sugar wear off.

Of course, if it's early enough in the day, and you have the time, a quick 30-minute nap might be more reinvigorating than a cup of joe. Better yet, if you can swing it, go for a "caffeine nap" and get the best of both worlds. Otherwise stick to a gradual ingestion of caffeine when you start to really drag.

Food is also important for any reading marathon. A bunch of sugar in your coffee may not be ideal, but you do still need some fuel to keep your mind running at full steam. Again, there is right way to go about snacking. User lil' writergirl at the National Novel Writing Month forums suggests some helpful rules:

> Make sure the snack:
>
> - Is not greasy or wet, as this will harm the pages.
> - Can be eaten without looking.
> - Can be eaten with one hand.
> - Takes a while to chew, so a bag can last a long time.

The last thing you want to do is harm the pages, especially if it's a book you want to sell back after the class ends. Dry off some baby carrots with a paper towel, much on some dried fruit, or dig into some trail mix. A pair of chopsticks, however, can make one-handed munching on messy snacks easily doable.

all the rest of your passwords

Volume 0%

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If you're taking a break to eat pizza or other potentially messy food, that's fine, but don't try to tame the mighty grease while you read. She also notes that a lot of books have what you might call "boring parts" where the action drags. Those are some of the best parts for snacking. Instead of losing interest and wondering when something good will happen, your snack will keep you active and satisfied enough to get through it.

Switch Out Your Phone for Your Book

If you're thinking you can't find five hours to dedicate to reading in one day, I've got news for you: you probably already read that much anyway. According to a recent study from the UK's University of Lancaster, and published in _PLOS One_, the average person spends time with their

smartphone for about five hours per day. Most of that person-smartphone interaction is reading things like news, Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, online dating profiles, and Lifehacker. So, switch your book with your phone.

If you can manage, leave your phone behind for the day, or at least hide it away with airplane mode activated. The same goes for anything you use to consume information, like tablets, laptops, TVs, and protocol droids. You're in emergency reading mode, so you need to take all of those minutes you're normally "killing" and reallocate them to your book. And that means everywhere you go! Instead of pulling your phone out while you're waiting in line at the grocery store, waiting to order your meal, or any other times you habitually whip out your phone, pull out your book and read instead. That's a lot of time you forget you have that is easily reclaimed. Of course, if your book is stored on your phone or tablet, you can still use it, but keep it in airplane mode and avoid frivolous distractions at all costs.

Incorporate Audiobooks

Alternatively, you can choose to use your ears instead of your eyes. Maybe you have some errands that absolutely need to get done today. Or maybe you really want to exercise, but can't afford to lose that much time. That's where audiobooks come in. Depending on your reading speed, you may actually read faster than an audiobook can be read to you, but they're perfect for filling in the gaps if you're really short on time.

For example, you could read for a couple of hours, download the audiobook and listen to it while you drive, shop, do house chores, and exercise, then return to your book once you have everything done. You may even find listening to the whole thing much easier overall. The only downside is you'll have to pay for the same book twice if you didn't plan on listening to the audiobook beforehand. Also, depending on what you have to read, there may not be an audiobook version out there. Lesser-known literature and academic texts will likely need to be read the old-fashioned way, but if you're reading on the Kindle app (or Instapaper and Pocket for shorter texts), you can use text-to-speech to listen along. It

won't sound as nice as a legitimate audiobook, but you can listen at different speeds and it's a solid option. However you manage to listen to your book, it can save you some serious time.

Don't Make Reading Marathons Your Go-To

Now, before you dive in, keep in mind that books aren't generally meant to be read within a day. Like a TV show split into episodes, books are divided into segments you consume gradually over time. Pacing yourself through a book and giving yourself time to think about what you've read will always be better for your overall comprehension. Reading an entire book in the span of a day should be your hail mary when you've run out of time, and you'll obviously be better off doing the simple things to make time for your reading.

That being said, taking notes, looking up definitions, and even jotting down your own thoughts about the book's exciting moments will help you hold on to what you've read. There are some drawbacks to reading an entire book within a day, sure, but it's not impossible to cross the finish line with the important information in tow.