



HOW TO READ A BOOK IN 15 MINUTES

You're a leader. Time is precious. You've got to read, but reading everything you need to read-not to mention what you want to read-is tough. What's a leader to do? One solution is to master the art of reading a book in 15 minutes!

The English philosopher and statesman, Francis Bacon (1561-1626), shared these memorable thoughts about reading:

Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.[1]

Following the five steps below will help you know whether to taste the book or dig in for the entire meal.

1. EXAMINE THE TITLE PAGE, SUBTITLE, AND PREFACE

In the classic text, *How To Read A Book*, Mortimer Adler states the first rule for reading a book: "You must know what kind of book you are reading, and you should know this as early in the process as possible, preferable before you begin to read." [2] Is this book primarily knowledge-oriented (focusing on the "what") or action-oriented (focusing on the "how to"). The title, subtitle, and preface will give you clues. Examine them carefully.

2. READ THE PUBLISHER'S BLURB ON THE DUST JACKET

Publishers craft succinct summaries of their books. They provide a paragraph synopsis and a brief introduction to the author. Does the author's focus and intention match your needs?



3. STUDY THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

A well-organized table of contents acts as a travel guide for the reader. Examine how the book is divided. Look closely at the chapter titles. Where is the writer going? Is this a journey you want to take?

4. CHECK THE INDEX FOR THE RANGE OF TOPICS

An index is a short cut to discovering people, places, and topics hidden in the pages of a book. A good index is a free research assistant. Put this assistant to work. Skim the topics.

5. LOOK FOR KEY CHAPTERS; EXAMINE THEIR CONCLUDING SUMMARIES

Authors often summarize the entire contents of their chapters in a concluding paragraph. These summaries are invaluable and save the reader significant time. It may seem counterintuitive, but sometimes it pays to begin at the end of each chapter.

When we were kids, my dad took our family to dinner every Friday night. He had one rule: “You can get whatever you want, but you better eat all of it.” I think I’ve carried that mindset over to my reading. I feel the need to read every book cover-to-cover, to “clear my plate” so-to-speak. I don’t. This is foolish and impractical. As Bacon notes, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”

Give it a try! Pick up a book you don’t know much about. Give yourself 15 minutes. Is this a book to be tasted or chewed and digested.

1 Mick Rooney, “Bowker Releases Preliminary 2010 Annual Books in Production Report.” The Independent Publishing Magazine, May 18, 2011. From mickrooney.blogspot.com. Accessed March 14, 2012. Bowker was estimating 316,480 titles in 2010 alone.

2 Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How To Read A Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972). The authors discuss “pigeonholing a book” on pages 59-74.

