

#228 - 5 Ways to Organize Your Books

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 228 - 5 ways to organize your books. In fact, we're talking about five different personalities of book organization, so hopefully you'll see yourself in one of these.

We all have different challenges when it comes to organizing our books, but I think the biggest one that no one talks about in organizational conversations is comparison. We all have different numbers of books, approaches to books, patterns of reading our books, ways we choose our books, but when we talk about organizing them and what we do with what we have, we get a little squirrely because we're comparing ourselves to other readers we think are doing it the right way.

If you love to read and have a lot of books, you might call yourself a hoarder and feel bad for all the unread books you own. If you don't own many books at all, you might feel like you count as less of a reader because you don't have towers of bookshelves. If you have unorganized stacks, you might wish your books were ordered better. If you have very ordered bookshelves but then see people with cozy stacks of books next to every chair in the house, you wonder if you're too uptight. We compare this kind of thing all the time, and so today I want to talk about 5 ways to organize your books and some questions to help you nail what you need to do to be a genius about your own personal library based on what matters to you.

First, I want to start with something I learned from Laura Vanderkam that has been mentioned several times on the What Should I Read Next podcast hosted by Anne Bogel, and it is this idea of supply and demand readers. According to Laura, most people fall into one of these two categories, and know which one you usually are will likely help you better name your book organizational personality.

So a supply reader is someone who sets aside time to read consistently and it's usually the same time. These people choose to read, no matter what they're reading. The act of reading is the focus. There is always a supply of reading because there's always something to read and a time set aside to do it. Demand readers - which is what I am - are readers who make time to read when there's something they really want to read. Laura says in her article about this that "time becomes elastic." You might think you normally don't have time on a weekend to read, but then you start reading this crazy twisty thriller and can't put it down and then don't put it down. Demand readers are the ones who joke about ignoring their families and responsibilities to finish a book.

Now I just said I'm a demand reader. Does that mean I don't have set times I read? Of course not. I do. I have times of the day when I do choose to reach for a book more than something else, but I definitely lean toward that demand side of making room when I want to.

There are also people who are mood readers versus list readers. Some people make a list of what they want to read and then just plow through it. Some people, like me, read based on what I'm in the mood for. That means that I like having a lot of books at my disposal so I can find something that fits my mood without waiting.

Some people like to read one thing at a time, others like to have a few things going at a time. Some people quit books that don't work. Others are chronic finishers even if they hate it. There are a lot of reading personalities and ways to categorize your reading habits. But what's really good to do is to let those habits and ways you read inform how you organize your books. Those things are linked.

So if you could describe your reading habits or your reading personality in a couple of words, what would they be? Are you supply or demand? Are you a mood reader? Do you like multiple books going at once? Do you reach for a book when you see it, or if it's not front and center will you forget you're reading? Knowing that things about how you read will help you organize in a way that makes sense for you.

Okay, so now let's look at actual book organization. These are five personalities of book organization. This is arbitrary. This is not science. I'm making this up. You can even be more than one of these, okay? Just roll with it.

The book organization personalities that I made up are The Collector, The Borrower, The Stacker, The Shelver, and The Explorer. I will now describe this arbitrary but I think fairly accurate organizational personalities.

First, The Collector. I am a collector. I used to call myself a book hoarder, but then my sister was like "let's find a reframe." And she was right. Calling myself a book hoarder is kind of shaming. It's not embracing the fact that I love owning books. I love it. Love it love it. I own so many books, most of which I haven't read. Physical books, ebooks on my Paperwhite, I have so many. And I don't need to be embarrassed or ashamed of that. It gives me great joy to have a robust personal library where I can choose whatever I'm in the mood for. If you too are a collector, be a collector! It's okay!

Now what are some organizational rules for you as a collector? I think the best House Rule you can set for yourself is to know your limit. What are your book owning limits? If you have an e-reader, that's almost unlimited. You buy whatever books you want when they're \$1.99 or whatever. If you like to own physical books, name your limits. Choose a book shelf or four. Say that these are for your books. Within that limit, you can organize however you want - by color, by genre, by whether or not you've read them, whatever works. I have a bookcase for unread books and one for read books I want to keep. Books that I've read but will pass along usually sit on my counter for no more than two days and I pass them along to my sister or a friend. But my bookcase of unread books is pretty packed. I don't really have room to buy more physical books. So I can either honor that limit and take a break from buying physical books (which not having in-person used book sales helps that), or I can read more off of that physical unread

bookshelf to free up some space rather than continuing to read ebooks or library books. So the biggest House Rule for a collector is to name and honor your limits.

I just mentioned library books. Speaking of library books, the next personality is The Borrower. This is the person that primarily borrows their books from the library or a friend. In that case, the organization is two-fold: how do you organize the books that don't belong to you but are in your home and how do you organize your to-be-read list or TBR? A collector basically owns her TBR. A borrower needs a place for those. Most likely, if you're a borrower, you already use your library holds list as your tbr. If you hear about a book you want to read, you likely try and borrow it right away. If you don't, if that's a rhythm you'd like to improve, there are ways to do that. You can apply a Lazy Genius principle or two to that specific problem - where can I decide once to immediately go and note what books I want to read when I hear them?

For organizing the books you're borrowing, generally speaking borrowers (at least in my anecdotal experience) don't often have a ton of physical books at any time. You basically read when a book is available for you. You might have seven titles come in from your hold list at the same time, but those books will likely be organized where you read. You have them on your nightstand or next to the chair in the living room or in a small stack on the table. Borrowers have fewer challenges with organizing books they own because they own very little. It's the TBR that might be the challenge.

We'll be right back.

Okay, next book organization personality - The Stacker. Now a stacker can be a collector or a borrower. A stacker is a reader who just likes being surrounded by books, and wherever they are stacked up works great. There is no shame in having stacks of books in multiple places. I am not a stacker even though I am a collector, mostly because I find greater comfort in shelved books than I do stacked books, even though I love being surrounded by books. I think the point is that stackers find great comfort in a stack of books and aren't bothered by those stacks of books taking up space somewhere. It's almost like a cozy way to apply the principle of the magic question. The magic question is what can I do now to make something easier later? So in this case, what can I do now to make reading easier later? Have books in all my reading places. A stack of one, a stack of seven. Having books around is a reminder to read but is also really comforting to some people. Embrace your stacks.

Next up. The Shelver. You like books in shelves. You want a bookcase, a container, a limit, a place for your books. You might even not care about trinkets and styled bookshelves because you just want books in there. But basically you prefer your book organization to be in shelves. I'm a shelfer. I love a bookshelf. If that's you, embrace your bookshelf. Make it work for you. There's the lazy genius principle Put Everything In Its Place. That's a great guide for the shelfer. A bookshelf is a natural place. You can be done with your organization right there. But perhaps you'd like to have more specific places for specific books. This is where you might decide if a book's place is based on the color of its spine, its genre, its author, its title, or if you've read it already. You can be a wild shelfer and just stick a book on the shelf, but if you want to be able

to enjoy the bookshelf and find what you're looking for, figure out how to put everything in its place. You have the physical limits of a bookshelf and like what it gives you, but make sure you're shelving those books in a way that supports what matters to you about reading.

As an example, by unread shelf which I'll put on Instagram sometime this week, is a bookcase with five shelves. The top two are nonfiction, and the rest are fiction. That's it. That's the organization. Then my read-and-keep shelf is grouped by genre so I'll know how to find what I'm looking for when I want to reread something. So if you're a shelve, put everything in its place. Which can be the shelf but might could use a little more finessing depending on what matters to you about your reading habits.

Finally, The Explorer. I almost called the explorer the beginner, but I think some people enjoy changing up how they read and how they organize their books simply because they love being around books in any form. But if you're a beginner when it comes to reading and don't have a rhythm yet, be an explorer. Figure out if you'd rather be a collector or a borrower, a stacker or a shelve, or anything else you want to make up. The best principle here is to be kind to yourself in your process of exploring and figuring out what you like. Reading is so personal, and so is the organization of what you read or want to read. The point of all of this is to simply enjoy the reading life, and no matter what you need to do to make that happen, you should do it! And if that means exploring and changing it up and reorganizing bookshelves over and over again, do it. Do it do it do it.

The gift of this very arbitrary podcast episode is that it's a reminder that we can all do what makes sense for us based on what matters most. If you want to read as often as possible, figure out small ways to have books on hand, times chosen to read, or simple ways to choose what to read next. If you want to be surrounded by books, don't feel bad for owning 200 titles that you'll need awhile to get through. If that matters, prioritize it. You do you.

If you want more reading resources, we'll put a few in the show notes, but for now I hope you just feel encouraged to embrace how you read, how you organize what you read, and now use that lens to notice specific organizational ideas or hacks when you're listening to book podcasts or friends talk about reading or walk into someone's home and see their bookshelves or lack thereof. We can all do our own thing without feeling badly about our choices. Stack, collect, borrow, shelve, explore... all the things.

Before we go, let's celebrate our lazy genius of the week! This week it's Katie Cox who shared in her stories about a small change she made after listening to the shoe episode a few weeks ago! She says "lightbulb moment when I listened to the lazy genius podcast today! The shoe episode made me realize how ridiculous it was to keep my kids' socks upstairs in their rooms when their shoes are close to the front door. Now there is a basket of socks below their shoes. And a laundry bag for tossing dirty socks when they come home." I love this so much, Katie! I love the small step of moving the socks to where the shoes are, but you also applied the magic question - what could I do now to keep this sock situation easier later? By having a laundry bag

there for dirty socks too. So awesome. So simple and actionable and I hope it's working well for you. Thanks, katie, for being the lazy genius of the week!

Okay, y'all, thanks so much for listening! Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!