

The Gift of Reading

One of my father's greatest gifts to me cost nothing at all but has a price beyond value: a love of books, reading, and learning. It's a gift that I open many times each day, can enjoy no matter where I'm at or what circumstances I'm in, and one of that I have enjoyed passing on to my children. At an early age, I was taken to the public library every two weeks to get the maximum allotment of books – 15. Every week, I finished them all and couldn't wait for another week to go buy so I could get 15 more.

As an adult, not much has changed – except there is no maximum, and I had more time to read as a kid! That's a somewhat of a bummer for me, but I still give the library a workout: in 2008, I read 103 books from our local library. In addition, I have purchased an additional 50 or so, and also do daily web searches on topics of interest to me.

In order to process that amount of reading, I don't "read" each book the same way. Over the years, I've gleaned a few reading helps. Believe it or not, a book helps me read books: *How to Read a Book*, a classic by Mortimer Adler, gives these 4 levels of reading:

- Elementary Reading – What does the sentence say?
- Inspectional Reading – What is the book about?
- Analytical Reading – What does the book mean?
- Syntopical Reading – What does a comparison of books on the subject reveal?

To get the most out of a book in the least amount of time, try this strategy:

1. Read the title.
2. Read the introduction.
3. Read the Table of Contents.
4. Flip through the material, scanning the chapter titles and sub-headings. Note the words that stand out as bold, different colors, underlined, or italicized.
5. Examine the illustrations, captions, charts and diagrams. Read the pull-quotes and sidebars.
6. Scan through the index looking for buzz words that interest you.
7. Read the first chapter.
8. Flip through the book and read the first sentence of each paragraph. In a well written and edited book, the most important sentence containing the topic is usually the first sentence of the paragraph — but not always.
9. Read the last chapter. If there is an executive summary, read it.
10. Read any other information on the cover or dust jacket.

While the knowledge gained from reading is important, the real benefit is from the habit of reading. When you are continually reading, you condition your mind to keep taking in new knowledge. Your thinking remains fresh and sharp. Your brain is always churning on new ideas, looking for new connections it can make. Every day you pour in more ideas, which your brain must find a way to integrate into your existing knowledge base. Frequent reading fires up your neural activity, even during the periods when you aren't reading.

Reading, then, is truly the gift that keeps on giving. Why don't you bless yourself and those around you by reading a new book this week? Need a suggestion? My library is always open!

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