

Some Books Are Meant to Be STUDIED Not READ

It can be satisfying and enjoyable to read books without too much strain – the type that you can get through in 2-3 days. Some of these books are very good.

But I worry that many people – both students and graduates – expect this of every book, and are too soon discouraged when they encounter something that requires more struggle.

The truth is that not every book allows for a quick devouring. If you want to become familiar with many of the great books containing influential ideas, they're going to make you work for it. Some books, on some topics, require a tremendous amount of attention, re-reading, and pauses to check on sources or the meanings of certain terms (even if you're an "expert"). They are meant to be *studied*, not *read*.

I came across this sentiment in a book that I recently read with my boys – Chaim Potok's fabulous novel [The Chosen](#). At one point in the book, teenage character Danny Saunders is trying to read Freud, but grows frustrated due to the complexity of the works and unfamiliar terminology. But at one point, he has an epiphany:

"He had been going at it all wrong, he said, his eyes bright with excitement. He had wanted to read Freud. That had been his mistake. Freud had to be studied, not read. He had to be studied like a page of Talmud [the commentary on the Jewish law]. And he had to be studied with a commentary."

Susan Wise Bauer echoes the sentiment in the second chapter of her guide to self-education, [The Well-Educated Mind](#):

"To be enlightened – to be wise – you must wrestle with

[certain] sentences. Technology can do a great deal to make information gathering easier, but it can do little to simplify the gathering of wisdom. Information washes over us like a sea, and recedes without leaving its traces behind. Wrestling with truth... is a time-consuming process that marks us forever."

As I've said before, we all have holes in our education, and filling them in requires much in the way of personal effort. It's okay to punctuate your self-education with some easy reads. But those who also wish to know some of the past and modern classics will have to not merely *read* them, but *study* them.

