

Schopenhauer's 7 Pieces of Advice for Readers

In the news, we often hear [distressing statistics](#) about how few books Americans read in a given year. As a result, we tend to be ecstatic if people simply read at all.

But intellectual growth requires more than that; it requires that one becomes not only a reader, but a mature reader.

In his famous essay [“On Reading and Books,”](#) the German philosopher [Arthur Schopenhauer](#) (1788-1860) offers 7 timeless pieces advice on the dos and don'ts of being a mature reader:

1) Don't read without reflection.

“It is only by reflection that one can assimilate what one has read. If one reads straight ahead without pondering over it later, what has been read does not take root, but is for the most part lost.”

2) Don't waste time with bad books.

“The art of *not* reading is highly important. This consists in not taking a book into one's hand merely because it is interesting the great public at the time...

In order to read what is good one must make it a condition never to read what is bad; for life is short, and both time and strength limited.”

3) Don't read only new books.

“What can be more miserable than the fate of a reading public of this kind, that feels always impelled to read the latest writings of extremely commonplace authors who write for money only, and therefore exist in numbers?...

It is because people will only read what is *the newest* instead of what is the best of all ages, that writers remain in the narrow circle of prevailing ideas, and that the age sinks deeper and deeper in its own mire.”

4) Don't only read secondary sources.

“Books are written sometimes about this, sometimes about that great thinker of former times, and the public reads these books, but not the works of the man himself.”

5) Don't just buy books; read them!

“It would be a good thing to buy books if one could also buy the time to read them; but one usually confuses the purchase of books with the acquisition of their contents.”

6) Reread important books.

“Repetitio est mater studiorum. Any kind of important book should immediately be read twice, partly because one grasps the matter in its entirety the second time, and only really understands the beginning when the end is known; and partly because in reading it the second time one's temper and mood are different, so that one gets another impression; it may be that one sees the matter in another light.”

7) Read the classics.

“There is nothing that so greatly recreates the mind as the works of the old classic writers. Directly one has been taken up, even if it is only for half-an-hour, one feels as quickly refreshed, relieved, purified, elevated, and strengthened as if one had refreshed oneself at a mountain stream. Is this due to the perfections of the old languages, or to the greatness of the minds whose works have remained unharmed and untouched for centuries? Perhaps to both combined. This I know, directly we stop learning the old languages (as is at present threatening) a new class of literature will spring up, consisting of writing that is more barbaric, stupid, and worthless than has ever yet existed.”