

The Real Reason Why We Should Read

If you've ever fallen prey to clicking on a [BuzzFeed list](#) which asks you to check off the books you've read, you've probably come away somewhat ashamed, resolving to read more.

But while it's good to inspire ourselves to read more, it's important to remember what the real purpose of reading is. According to [Sir Francis Bacon](#), the purpose of reading is not to best others in debate, nor to look distinguished and learned. Rather, the purpose of reading is to exercise the mind through thought:

“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. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments, and the meaner sort of books, else distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things.”

And while thoughtful reading does advance our mental processes, it's important to also realize that reading on its own cannot make a fully developed individual. Two other elements are necessary for that to occur, namely, discussion and writing:

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit: and if he read little, he had need

have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend. Abeunt studia in mores [Studies pass into and influence manners].”

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