

# 4 Questions Every Intelligent Reader Should Ask

There's no denying that the literacy levels in the U.S. are a bit alarming:

- [14 percent](#) of adults can't read.
- Only [13 percent](#) of adults can read at a proficient level.
- [27 percent](#) of adults didn't read a book in the last year.
- [50 percent](#) of adults can't read a book written at an 8th grade level.

Yet in spite of these dismal numbers, a number of Americans do still read. The question is, how many of those readers are *smart* readers?

My guess: not many. In fact, many probably don't even know what it takes to be a smart reader.

According to the late American philosopher Mortimer Adler, a smart reader is one who goes beyond the cursory reading of a book and actually engages with a text. As Adler explains in [How to Read a Book](#), one of the best ways to become an engaged reader is to ask questions about the text and then seek to find answers. Adler recommends the following four questions in particular:

## 1. What is the Book About as a Whole?

According to Adler, the engaged reader should be able to explain the main themes and sub themes which the author lays out.

## 2. What is Being Said in Detail, and How?

In addition to knowing the main themes of the book, Adler suggests the engaged reader will "try to discover the main

ideas, assertions, and arguments that constitute the author's particular message."

### **3. Is the Book True, in Whole or Part?**

Instead of gullibly accepting everything an author says, it is important that an engaged reader weigh the truth of the author's words. Adler adds that the serious reader is "obligated... to make up [his] own mind."

### **4. What of It?**

The final step of an engaged reader is to determine how he will put what he has learned into practice. It is not simply enough for a reader to leave a book with a sense of accomplishment for having finished; he must also decide what he will do with his new-found knowledge.

Today, only [37 percent](#) of high school seniors are proficient in reading. Is it possible that we would see these scores rise if more schools taught students to be proactive readers with Mortimer Adler's simple steps to smart reading?

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