

# Way Too Many Books Are Being Published

In the past week, I've seen online a number of lists bearing some title to the effect of "Best Books I Read in 2017."

I somewhat enjoy looking at these lists, both for their recommendations, and for the windows they provide into their composers.

But I must admit that I mostly find them stressful and anxiety-inducing. They are yet another reminder of how many great books in various genres are being written, and of how little time I have to read them.

I don't think I am alone in my anxiety. John Naisbitt's line from his 1982 book [Megatrends](#) (which I have not read)—that "We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge"—has become something of an anthem for many today. The internet and social media has given us access to a dizzying amount of information, and attempting to process through it frequently afflicts us with intellectual paralysis.

Contributing to our information overload is the explosion in book publishing. In the U.S. alone there are over one million new books published each year (two-thirds of them are self-published). Those are added to the pile of the over 134 million unique titles [estimated](#) to have been published since the invention of Gutenberg's printing press. And apparently, even more books are on the way. According to one [survey](#), 81% (!!!) of Americans feel that they should write a book.

As a culture, we can be somewhat proud of having this problem of too many books. It's indicative of civilization that has enjoyed several hundred years of uninterrupted intellectual development. Plus, arguably the greater problem is not that we in America are inundated with books, but that [one-third of](#)

[American adults](#) did not read a single book in the past year.

At the same time, however, I cannot help but feel that the exponential proliferation of books is a sign of our culture's loss of an ultimate, shared purpose to life, and a consensus on how to achieve that purpose. Devoid of this consensus, each of us is left to search for the fragments of truth (or more often than not, mindless entertainment) in our frantic, scattered regimen of reading each year.

In [an essay for \*First Things\*](#), Russian author Eugene Vodolazkin (who is most known for his fabulous novel [Laurus](#), which I *have* read!) pronounced that the postmodern age is giving way to "the age of concentration"—one that turns "toward inner strengthening and social reconsolidation."

As part of this "age of concentration," I feel that we in America need to begin an effort to determine which books are truly essential for our citizens to read and assimilate. We need to identify the key texts that should act as the foundation of our shared cultural and interpersonal knowledge.

We need an intellectual harbor that can help prevent us from drowning in all the information.

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