



READ MORE BOOKS NOW

Lesson #1

Build a Good Library

Imagine you're standing in front of a bakery window, filled with pastries. You see danishes, cookies, donuts, and you can smell the fresh bread. What are the odds you indulge in a treat? If you're like me, pretty high.

Now, flip the scene. Imagine you're in a dark basement, with dirty walls and rusted pipes, and in the corner, sitting in a puddle, you spot a moldy piece of bread. What are the odds you taste that? I'm guessing zero.

What this thought experiment shows is that when we're surrounded by lots of appealing options, we're likely to try one. But if our choices are slim and undesirable, we won't. That's true of baked goods, but it's also true of books. The more books that surround us, appealing books that we really want to read, the more zealous we'll become in our reading.

That's why before getting into practical reading strategies, we need to start with two basic requirements, two things we need to establish even before opening our first book: first, the *desire* to read, and second, *immediate access* to good books.

How do you achieve those two things? Simple: by growing a personal library.



Now, I can already anticipate an objection. Why should I grow a library at home when my *public* library is already well-stocked and, even better, it's free! Why do I need lots of books at home? Well, here are four main reasons why:

First, you can't write in library books. Well, I suppose you could, but you'd be smote by the Library Gods. So don't do it. But as we'll come to see, writing in books is one of the best ways to increase your reading output and to remember what you read. The more books you write in, the more books you'll read. Simple as that.

Second, with a personal library, you see appealing books every day. Good books on your shelves, beckoning to you each day, are strong motivators to get you reading. When I come home from work, for instance, the first thing I see is my wife and kids, but right behind them, on the shelves are thousands of interesting books. It makes it easy to sit down, grab one, and start reading. We'll come back to this a little later, but for now just remember that the more books you see, the more books you'll read.

Third, with a personal library, you own the books. For better or worse, we pay more attention to things we own. There's a psychological motivation in having physical possession of a book. Owning a book means you're committed to it. You're not just courting it; you're in a relationship. So, the more books you own, the more books you'll read.

Fourth, you have instant access to good books. You want to ensure that whenever you're ready to read, you don't have to search or wait for the chance to grab a good book. You don't have to get in the car, go to the bookstore, or visit the library. You can just sit down and start reading. Having a well-stocked library ensures you'll never be hungry for good books. The more books you have available, the more books you'll read.

So, those are the four main reasons why having a good home library will boost your reading. It will grow your desire for reading, since good books will be constantly present and visible in your home, and it will give you immediate access to books you can enjoy.

But all of that raises a question. I know you're probably thinking, "OK, but how do I actually grow a decent home library? How do you find and acquire good books without breaking the bank?"

Well, it's a two-step process. First you need to identify good books worth acquiring, and then you need to find cheap ways to acquire them.

Here are my favorite methods for identifying good books. (And by the way, keep a running list somewhere of the books you hope to acquire. I use a spreadsheet that I've built up over several years, and it contains several lists of top books and recommendations, all sorts of titles that I hope to add to my library.)

The first place I look for book recommendations is online. As we all know, for better or worse, the Internet tracks *everything* about our lives—our spending, browsing, emailing, and chatting. But it can also track the books you buy online, and then use that data to suggest new books you'll probably like based on past purchases.

So, for example, when looking for appealing books, you might visit the Amazon book pages of titles you've already read and enjoyed, then scroll down and check out other books listed under, "Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought..." Even better, if you've bought a decent number of books from Amazon in the past, go to Amazon's "Recommended for You" page, which offers book suggestions based on your own purchase and browsing history.

Other online sites like GoodReads and LibraryThing act as social networks for book lovers. You input different titles or genres you've liked in the past, and they provide surprisingly insightful recommendations, based on feedback from millions of other readers. What I like most about these services is that the recommendations are data-driven and fueled by large sample sizes. They each have millions of users, and chances are high that if you like Book A, and thousands of people who liked Book A *also* liked Book B, you'll probably like Book B, too. So, if you're looking for good books for your personal library, definitely start with the Internet.

A second approach is to ask what your friends are reading. Every couple of months, I'll ask my friends on social media, "Read any good books lately?" They'll usually respond with a ton of suggestions. Try that yourself. However, you want to keep in mind that your friends likely have very diverse tastes in books, and some of them, quite frankly, might not be reliable guides. For example, if a friend says, "Read Book A! It was the best book I've ever read!!", consider that it might be the *only* book he's read in a long while. That's why I typically follow up with questions like "Why did

you like that book?” or “How did it change your life?” In fact, a much better question to lead with is simply, “Any book that recently changed your life? What was it, and how did it impact you?”

A third approach is to ask the experts. Right now, picture in your mind five people you really admire—mentors, heroes, or leaders in your field. What books inspired or influenced them? What titles changed their lives? Seek out those answers. For example, if I was looking for a new book on prayer, I would identify the top five spiritual masters I know and see if I can determine their favorite books on prayer. Or I might even track down their email addresses and ask them directly: “What five books on prayer would you most recommend to me?” Most people will *love* the chance to reflect on and recommend their favorite books. So just ask! You’ll be surprised.

A fourth approach is what I call follow the rabbit hole. This happens when you’re reading an absorbing book, typically non-fiction, and you see that the writer keeps citing a particular author or a particular book. Take note of that, and after you finish this initial book, follow it up by reading the author or book he keeps citing. Then in that next book, see if there’s an author or book that pops out in *his* bibliography, and so on. This approach has taken me on many wonderful adventures, deep into a particular field that I never would have otherwise explored.

OK, let’s pause and recap. So far, we’ve learned *why* you want to have a good home library. You want to always have good books around you, calling out to be read. We’ve also learn how to *identify* good books worth adding to your home library, by looking online, asking friends and experts, following the rabbit hole.

The last step is to actually acquire many of those good books, to build up your home library. How do you that without spending tons of money? Well, after building a home library with over 4,000 books, here are my favorite methods:

First, start with local used bookstores. Go on Google Maps and search for used bookstore. Chances are, there’s a decent used bookstore within driving distance of your house. And if so, they’re bound to have lots of good books for cheap. You can get great books for \$2, \$3, or \$4 each. Also, many second-hand shops have websites now, with their full inventory listed online, which means you can search a store’s collection before visiting. So that’s where you should start out—visit your local used bookstore often.

Second, buy used books through Amazon’s marketplace. When you see a good book on Amazon, instead of buying a new copy, click on the small “Used” book link underneath the main purchase icon. That will take you to a list of used copies from around the country, which you can often purchase for up to 90% off the retail price—sometimes as little as \$0.01 per book! You do have to pay \$3.99 shipping on used books through Amazon, but even then you’ll still usually come out ahead.

Third, visit your local library. Libraries often have sales where they clear out older inventory. This is a great opportunity to scoop up tons of books on the cheap. Other libraries have a “Friends of the Library” store where they sell donated books, including recent bestsellers, for just a dollar or two apiece. I’ve added some amazing books to my home library from sales like this. Before visiting your local library, give them a call and ask if they have a store, or if they’re planning any book sales in the near future.

Four, check out estate sales. It’s a sobering fact that when people die, someone has to handle all their stuff. Many times the family or executor will hold an “estate sale” to auction off furniture, clothes, or collectibles. Other times they’ll just host a garage-sale where anyone can pick through the items—and usually buy them for extremely cheap. On more than one occasion, I’ve stumbled across a garage sale featuring a massive home library that someone left behind. Obviously, this strategy is a bit more hit and miss than the others, because you can’t control when an estate sale occurs. But if you ever come across one, check it out. You could strike literary gold.

Fifth and finally, downsizing friends. As many people near retirement, especially if they’ve become empty-nesters, they naturally want to downsize their home and possessions. And that means giving away or selling book collections. I’ve often been the benefactor of aging friends who have no interest in maintaining a large home library, but who are excited to pass on their books to someone who will read them. Consider any friends, family, co-workers, or mentors who might be looking to divest their books, and make yourself available. Don’t be pushy or obnoxious, but subtly hint that you’re trying to grow your own home library. They’ll get the clue and perhaps offer you some of their books.

Whew! So there’s a ton of tips and advice for you, and this is just Lesson 1! Again, the first key to reading more books is to grow your *desire* for reading books, and to ensure you have *immediate access* to them. A good home library will accomplish both goals.

You need a home library. I've never met a fashionista with an empty closet. I've never met a glutton with an empty pantry. And I've never met a prolific reader who owns just a few books.

So, grow your home library, packed with books you like, and set yourself up for lots of great reading. Your appetite will grow and your library will be ready to satisfy it.

And that's exactly what we'll learn in the next lesson, how to ensure you're always in position to read. See you there!