



READ MORE BOOKS NOW

Lesson #4

Don't Be a Slave

According to a recent analysis by Google, roughly 130 million different books have been published in modern history. However, that includes various languages. If we narrow it down to English only, we're looking at about 20 million titles, which is still a lot. Plus, in America, we publish around 200,000 new books each year. So, that means within the next fifty years, as a reader, you'll have to choose from among 30 million books to read.

That's a lot of books.

Now let's suppose you challenge yourself to read one book per week, which is totally doable. At that rate, you'll finish 2,600 books over the next fifty years. Not bad. But that's only 0.009% of all the books available to you. By reading those 2,600 books, you're neglecting over 29,997,00 other titles. To say it another way, for every book you read, you have to ignore ten thousand other books.

What this means it that we need to choose our books *very wisely*. We need to select titles that make a real difference in our lives, books that cause us to think, reflect, and grow. Often that means sticking with books we enjoy.

In 2006, when the *Harry Potter* phenomenon was really taking off, a literacy group commissioned a large national study, and found that 51% of young *Harry Potter*



readers said they did *not* read books for fun before reading *Harry Potter*, yet they did afterward. The effect was even higher among boys. Roughly 61% said they started reading for fun after reading *Harry Potter*.

Why the sudden change? Why did *Harry Potter* produce so many new readers? Because people enjoyed the series. That's it.

It's a simple fact. The more we *enjoy* the books we're reading, the more we'll read. Most of us know this intuitively, and from experience, but we still find it difficult to escape the false belief that good reading must be difficult and uncomfortable—more like going to the dentist than playing our favorite game.

Why is that? Well, if you were like me growing up, many of your school teachers forced you to read specific books by a specific deadline. It didn't matter if you liked the the book. You *had* to read it. From a young age, our reading was shackled to the demands of others. Teachers chose which books we read, how fast we read them, and how much of the book we needed to finish—usually the whole thing.

Now, those requirements can obviously be helpful in school. Without them, most young people just wouldn't read the books (I know I wouldn't.) And thanks to the demands of our teachers, many of us stretched ourselves and read books we didn't quite grasp but needed to learn. So, that's a crucial phase to becoming a better reader.

But the best readers don't stay in that school time phase, where reading is assigned, boring, and chosen by others. Instead, they seek out books that *they* actually enjoy. They look forward to picking up books—even the hard ones—and they get frustrated only when sleep or busyness prevents them from getting to the next chapter.

This is a big to reading more books: **you want to choose books you actually enjoy reading.**

The problem is most of us bow to the interests of friends, culture, or reviews from so-called literary experts. These people suggest we have to read certain books to be respected or a well-read people. Or they tell us that *this* is the one book everyone is reading so you should read it and like it, too!

But you need to liberate yourself from that slavery. Once you give yourself permission to read whatever you want, you'll read longer, faster, more excitedly, which means you'll ultimately read *more*.

This principle doesn't only apply to choosing new books to read. It also applied to books you're in the middle of. Each time you pick up a book you've already started, ask yourself, "Why am I continuing to read this? What makes it better than the ten thousand other books I'm ignoring? Am I *really* enjoying this book?"

If the answer is "No," don't be afraid to put it back on the shelf. Never force yourself to read a book that you don't enjoy. There are just so many good books in the world that it's foolish to waste time on books that aren't helping or pleasing you.

This is important: very few books deserve to be read, and even fewer deserve to be finished. Let me say that again: very few books deserve to be read, and even fewer deserve to be finished.

Opening a book does not create a vow. You're not married to the book. You don't have to stick with it until the end. If you're not enjoying it, just quit.

Many of us grew up with parents who enforced the "empty your plate" rule. Regardless of portion size, or whether we actually enjoyed the food, we had to finish everything on our plate. Your English teachers probably used the same principle. To read a book meant to "clean its plate," to read it from cover to cover.

But this assumes all books are worth finishing. They're not. Some books contain one or two golden nuggets, or an especially rich chapter, but the rest is fluff. So, there's no reason to force yourself to read the whole thing.

Now, let me warn you about two challenges that make it hard to quit a book early. First is what economists call the "sunk cost" fallacy. Many of us think, "Well, I've already invested good money and time into this book. I've spent five hours on it, or it cost me \$30, so I might as well finish it." But that's bad reasoning. You've already paid for the book once, with your time and money. You can't get that back—it's done. But there's no reason to pay for it again with unnecessary attention. If the book fails to bring value to your life, close it and find another that can. It doesn't matter how much time and money you've already devoted to the book.

A second reason we hesitate to quit a book is because we think only books we finish from cover to cover “count” as being read. But that’s a self-imposed shackle. A book “counts” if it benefits you, whether it did so in one page, fifty pages, or a hundred pages. And why does it matter what “counts” anyways? You’re not reporting your book reading to anyone.

In the long run, whether you finish twenty books cover to cover, or read vital parts of fifty books without completing them, is meaningless. You’re reading for *you*, not for anyone else. There’s no sense slogging your way through a bad book when ten thousand alternatives await—many of them better! By quitting bad books early, you give yourself a better chance to find books that will truly change your life.

But this all raises an obvious question: when’s the right time to quit a book?

Some readers apply a page count rule. Maybe they say, “I’ll give it 50 pages…” or 100 pages, and if they don’t find it enjoyable, or if they feel they’ve exhausted its value, they close it. This gives the author a fair chance, but not permission to enslave you.

Other readers like the Hundred-Minus-Your-Age rule. Simply subtract your age from 100, and that’s how many pages you should read before quitting. The older you are, and the more reading experience you have, the less time you need before confidently shelving a book. And this means once you turn 100, you’re totally free to judge a book by its cover!

In the end, your ultimate goal as a reader is not to *finish* more books (which is why this course is titled, “*Read More Books Now*” rather than “*Finish More Books Now*”.) Your goal is to find and absorb books that positively shape your life.

Eleanor Roosevelt once affirmed, “What counts, in the long run is not what you read; it is what you sift through your own mind; it is the ideas and impressions that are aroused in you by your reading.”

Achieving this don’t always require reading a book cover to cover. In fact, most of the time, you can achieve those goals by reading three-quarters of a book, or a few chapters, or even a single sentence.

The Protestant theologian John Piper once reflected: “What I have learned from about twenty-years of serious reading is this: *It is sentences that change my life, not books.* What changes my life is some new glimpse of truth, some powerful challenge,

some resolution to a long-standing dilemma, and these usually come concentrated in a sentence or two. I do not remember 99% of what I read, but if the 1% of each book or article I do remember is a life-changing insight, then I don't begrudge the 99%."

That's really insightful.

So just to recap this lesson: readers know that *enjoyable* reading leads to more reading. When you find books and authors who pull you from page to page, reading is fun and quick. So don't become a slave to *other* peoples' book lists and recommendation, helpful as they can be. You're the ultimate judge about whether a book is worth reading for you.

Similarly, good readers are not slaves to their books. They don't allow a book's length to mandate how much of it they should read. They don't finish a book just because they started it or paid good money for it. They're in control, at all times, and are comfortable closing a book when it has served its purpose.

Find books you enjoy, and shelve them when you don't. Be the master of your books, not a slave.

In the next lesson, we'll explore how to quickly determine whether a book is worth reading by a tactic called x-raying. I'll see you there!