



How to read a Book in 45 minutes

Karl "Chuck B." Freiherr von Manteuffel

Memo #6

vLSM.org
Pamulang

This is a theoretical hyper-linked memo. It is in no way the replacement of [ADDOR72] or [GLASER98].

How to read a Book in 45 minutes [GLASER98, pp. 211 - 213]

1. Study the table of content
2. Read the last chapter
3. Read the preface
4. Read the introductory chapter
5. Read the appendices
6. Read the epilogues
7. See if author pulled it off and how
8. Read it backwards, and keep moving fast

How to present it in 5 minutes

9. Report the Table of Content
10. Report the little logic of the book and some generalizations.

Inspectional Reading [ADDOR72, pp. 32 - 35]

1. Look at the title page (and its preface).
2. Study the table of contents.
3. Check the Index.
4. Read the Dust Jacket/Publisher's Blurb/Back Cover.
5. Turn the pages, dipping here and there, reading a paragraph or two.

Analytical Reading [ADDOR72, pp. 163 - 164]

Finding what a book is about

1. Classify the book according to kind and subject matter.
2. State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity
3. Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and outline these parts as you have outlined the whole.
4. Define the problem or problems the authors has tried to solve.

Interpreting a Book's Contents

5. Come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words.
6. Grasp the author's leading propositions by dealing with his most important sentences.
7. Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.
8. Determine which of his problems the author has solved, and which he has not; and of the

latter, decide which the author knew he had failed to solve.

General Maxims of Intellectual Etiquette

9. Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say "I understand".
10. Do not disagree disputatiously or contenttiously.
11. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.

Special Criteria for Points of Criticisn

12. Show wherein the author is uninformed, misinformed, illogical, and the author's analysis is incomplete.

Syntopical Reading [ADDOR72, pp. 335 - 336]

Field Preparatory

1. Create a tentative bibliography of your subject.
2. Inspect all of the books on the tentative bibliography to ascertain which are germane to your subject.

Bibliography Amessed in Stage I

1. Inspect the books already indentified as relevant
 2. Bring the authors to the terms by constructing a neutral terminology
 3. Establish a set of neutral propositions for all of the authors by framing a set of questions to which all or most of the authors can be interpreted as employing.
 4. Define the issues, both major and minor ones, by ranging the opposing answers of authors to the various questions on one side of an issue or another.
 5. Analyze the discussion by ordering the questions and issues in such a way as to throw maximum light on the subject.
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How to read an Information System Article

([From the ISWorld List, August 2004](#)).

• Reply #1

I definitely have "reading strategies", but not just one. It depends mainly on the purpose of my reading. Let's do a qualitative case analysis :-)

- Case 1: I get a new issue of one if the journals I subscribe. I skim through it, and select the articles I'll read based on title, authors and abstract. Once selected, I start with the introduction, skip or read the literature review/theoretical foundations depending on how

it's written, briefly skim through the methodological part, skip the results, and go straight to discussion and conclusions. If the article seems relevant for something I'm doing or plan to do, I might end up introducing it in my database. This scheme probably follows some sort of "ludenic or play" approach (Stephenson, 1967), I'm reading for the fun of it, to stay updated, etc.

- Case 2: I am looking for references to document one of my papers, or reviewing what's new out there, BUT my ultimate purpose is to use it in my own work. In this case, I select papers based on title, I carefully dissect the abstract, briefly skim through the introduction; go straight to the literature review/theoretical foundations, which I carefully dissect. I normally skip the methodology, or briefly look at it to know what's being used, and jump straight into the discussion. Conclusions usually don't get too much attention either. Once finished, I enter the article in my database. This strategy follows the "uses and gratification" approach (Dozier and Rice, 1984)
- Case 3: I have assigned a paper to read for a session, doctoral colloquium, area meeting, etc. Then I read the whole thing, cover to cover, and highlight whatever I think could be interesting to talk about.

There might be other cases, articles suggested by a colleague, articles read in a conference (that's mostly skimming through the whole thing), etc.

References

- Stephenson, W. "The Play Theory of Mass Communication" Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Dozier, D. and R. Rice "Rival Theories of Electronic Newsreading, in R. Rice (ed.), The New Media, pp. 103-128. London: Sage Publications, 1984.

• Reply #2

I am an ABD within 4 month of defending, and I have read a lot of articles over the past 5 years. Here's my technique:

- read the abstract.
- read the major and minor headings.
- read the conclusion.

Usually, after the abstract I know if this article is worth reading. By that, I mean it is relevant to my research. Depending on how relevant, I would spend more time reading the text. Some I have read very little.

Others I have read several times.

• Reply #3

I usually decide by the title whether I think I would be interested.

If I think I would be interested, I read the abstract. If the abstract makes it seem I would be interested, what I do next depends on the nature of the paper.

If I am primarily interested in the outcome of the study I may well jump to the "Findings" section and read on from there.

If I am interested in the justification for the study and the previous findings, I will start from the beginning and read until either (a) I find I'm really not that interested or (b) I have read the complete paper.

What will typically cause me to discontinue reading a paper is if I find the author(s) are out in right field due to their apparent lack of true business experience in the area he/she/they are discussing. For example, there is a forecasting methodology called COCOMO. The persons advocating this technique have, to me, not a true clue as to what is involved in actual software development.

- **Reply #4**

Do you read it from the beginning to the end?

In the beginning yes, but not anymore.

Do you have a certain pattern (e.g. first the abstract, the conclusion, then the reference, etc.)?

Along with good speed reading practice the initial scan is to get an overview of the entire article, then read anything that might be interesting regardless of position (i.e. it could be quote, illustration, graph, reference, abstract, future study, etc.), then I usually read the abstract, then the conclusion then I ask how did the author(s) get there? Then I read in between to figure out if they did it the way I thought they might/should but also did they find what we would expect? If not, why not? What are they hypotheses? What are the results? Once I get a framework in place, I might read it or I might feel that I've extracted adequate knowledge.

How/Why/When do you decide not to continue to read it?

Time constraints, cognitive capacity. Is it relevant to my focus? Is it even tangential? Is it remotely possible that it might be tangential? Is it interesting? Is it logical? Is it in a journal of note that I might like to cite? It might refer to something that is of more interest and I may discontinue one to segue to that reference. Or I may encounter a stumbling block, a word, concept, method that I need clarification and I'll set it aside so that I don't waste time. I know that if I decide to discontinue reading I can come back later for another pass at it, i.e. it's not a final an irreversible decision so I can make it without much angst.

- **Reply #5**

First paragraph, all the pictures then the conclusion. If those things are deeply interesting then the whole thing from beginning to end. Never the abstract.

- **Reply #6**

A very interesting question! I read from the beginning till the middle or the end of the introduction, then start browsing through it, stopping here and there until i get to the end and and then I go back again. I try to read the abstract first but do not persist if I do not understand it fully - just go to the introduction. I always try to read the conclusion and try to read it twice before i get back to the begining to start the proper reading. I look at references first if I am reviewing; otherwise i try to follow them up the way the writer writes. I stop reading when I am no longer interested-too difficult to determine (not my area of research and/or teaching, , too long, hard to understand what the author means, too sketchy and thus of lesser value, too PR style...)

- **Reply #7**

I read the abstract first, usually. If it appears useful, I read from the beginning to the end of the article. If it begins with a case or several short vignettes, I read them. I often skip the description of past research and the current situation, which the author uses to set up the environment. I also skip descriptions of how the research was conducted. If it's a long article and quite academically written, I skip to the results or findings. I decide not to continue when

the results are not concisely stated or when they are not something a CIO can relate to. I read the references to see what I've missed on a topic - to make sure I've read what's out there. I hope this answer helps.

- **Reply #8**

A great deal depends on the purpose for which I read the paper, also considerations such as the likelihood I can easily get access to it again.

In general, if the article is quite 'positivistic' in style, I will probably treat it as I would treat a scientific paper in Psychology, viz read the Abstract, on that basis decide possibly to skim the intro and the conclusion, and then from that I will decide whether I want to keep it for further reference, e.g. by downloading, bookmarking or photocopying. On the other hand, if it is more 'speculative' in style I will probably treat the Abstract as relatively uninformative, and skim the whole paper to get a feel for the style of argumentation that is being deployed, and make a global judgement as to whether it is worth bothering with.

As I said above, a lot depends on the purpose - I might be looking to see if it contains an example of a particular technique from which I could learn, and in that case I may pay minimal attention to the broader context or conclusions, and immediately concentrate on the technical parts.

In general, it's important to be aware of why one is reading the literature at any one time, because the information explosion offers us infinite distractions. Now, can I ask you: why are you asking this question? Is it so that you can write papers in a way that will get IS researchers to read them? Or to guide your own reading habits? Or out of pure scientific curiosity?

- **Reply #9**

Do you read it from the beginning to the end?

It depends on quality: if it is readable, yes. Title and abstracts are the elements which suggest me to go on or to stop.

Do you have a certain pattern (e.g. first the abstract, then the conclusion, then the reference, etc.)?

Abstract, research model or references and conclusions. if I agree on or I like the conclusions I go back to the field/empirical part.

How/Why/When do you decide not to continue to read it?

Bad written papers (when you have to start 3 times a sentence to understand what he/she is claiming), when the paper is just discussing obvious or very common issues in a traditional (not innovative) way, when the key references in a field are not cited.

- **Reply #10**

I do not read from beginning to end. I read abstract, issues, conceptual model or framework, research methods, results in conjunction with references. Normally, I look at any figure or chart relating to conceptual model or framework, then read text later. The reasons are that I do not have enough time to read full papers. Just read abstract to have idea what the paper is about, then look at the conceptual model to have a general idea and also a quick look on references.

- **Reply #11**

I read the abstract followed by the introduction. I then briefly scan the lit review and methodology, and then read the conclusion. If it is a paper that has my interest at that point, I go back and "fill in the blanks." I rarely read the references unless there is a point I am interested in using in my own work-in-progress and want clarification or elaboration. (This is assuming that the references in the body of the document have the authors' names and dates, since I am usually familiar with the papers in the field of interest.)

- **Reply #12**

It would be very interesting to compare the reading patterns with the I/S researchers' level of experience! I usually firstly read the abstract, then shortly skip to the conclusions, look through the list of referenced literature and then read the rest of the article. It depends on how strongly related the publication is connected to my field of interest. If it is strongly related, I read it thoroughly from beginning to the end unless there aren't too much sections I already know.

References:

- [ADDOR72] **Adler, Mortimer J., van Doren, Charles.** 1972. *How to Read a Book*. Simon and Schuster, 2nd ed., pp. 426. [PN83 Adl CLMS, ISBN 6-7121-2209-5]
- [GLASER98] **Glaser, Barney G.** 1998. *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*. Sociology Press, pp. 254. [-, -]
- [WOBAR58] **Wood, Evelyn Nielsen, and Barrows, Marjorie Wescott.** 1958. *Reading Skills*. Holt, pp. 246. [808.54W85, ISBN -]



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