

How to Read More (And Whine Less About Wanting to Read More)

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I don't have any real friends so most of my conversations are with my mom. Lately, however, we've been having the same conversation over and over again:

Mom: Have you heard about/seen this thing?

Me: Nope. I've been reading.

Mom: Oh Wow must be nice. 🙄🙄🙄 I wish I had time to read. 🙄🙄🙄 But Alas, I am So Busy, finding time is So Hard,

And then she refreshes Facebook or whatever and I go back to the book or manga I'm reading on my phone.

I don't mean to rip on my mom here (well, okay, maybe I do a little). It's not even just her. I hear this same swan song every time I mention I've been reading more. Every time it comes up during idle chat with strangers or the five or so people with whom I regularly socialize, they always react the same way: *How nice for you*. I wish my life could be so *simple* and full of *free time* that I could waste it away on frivolous pursuits like *reading books*.

This sentiment chaps my ass in two major ways:

1. Reading books is not a frivolous pursuit.
2. You probably do have plenty of time to read and are just choosing not to.

I can't overstate point number two enough. I can say with the utmost certainty that most people have time to read, they're either just blinded by distractions or they don't actually want to read more and are trying to save intellectual face. You're allowed to not like reading, you know. I sure as fuck don't get it, but I also don't care enough to try converting you. There are other ways to be good to your brain. Some people dig crossword puzzles--hell, my mom makes them for a living--but I can't stand them. To each their own.

This week's post is for the people who genuinely do want to read more but find themselves scratching their heads when they try to make it work. If that's you, I know exactly how you feel, because I was that same guy until last year when I decided I'd had enough of being that guy. As it happened, I had slightly more free time than usual since I'd just graduated from college. Upon reflection, however, I realized that the bonus free time wasn't a necessity. It was just the thing that stripped away my remaining excuses.

You wanna read more? Good. You should. Here's how.

Drop the Paperback

I have this cousin. She loves reading but she hates books. Like, she really hates books. She hates having to carry them around, she hates the tiny print, and she hates having to move her eyeballs around to absorb the information within them.

You know what she loves, though? Audiobooks. She can't get enough of the damn things. Again, can't relate, but who am I to tell someone they're reading wrong? If she listens to the audio

version of a book I read with my eyes, are we not both obtaining the same information? Can we not discuss it on equal footing? What's the difference? Spoiler alert: There isn't one.

Personally, I much prefer the eyeball-moving method of reading because I'm a very visual person. But you know what I do hate? Paper books. They're easier on the eyes, sure, but they're heavy and they stink and it's super inconvenient to haul them around in addition to the other 950 things I have to remember when I'm leaving the house each day, especially if I need to carry more than one book at a time.

So, I read ebooks. Right on my phone, which I always have because I'm one of those dependent-on-technology types the Baby Boomers warned you about. I buy some on the Kindle store and rent others through sources like Libby and my local library. There are even reading apps, like [Serial Reader](#) for classic literature or [Beelinguapp](#) if you're into foreign language learning. It's the 21st century. Information is more accessible than ever before. We should be embracing that, not bashing people over the head with hardback books like some kind of nerdy barbarians. Don't be such a Luddite. You sound just like your [old-fashioned relative you hate].

Read Total Garbage

I have a confession: I love V.C. Andrews's books. If the name sounds kind of familiar, she wrote *Flowers in the Attic*. If you have no clue who she is, you're probably better off, and I'm sorry I put her into your circle of consciousness like that without asking first. V.C. Andrews was one of those highly formulaic writers, like Nicholas Sparks or Nora Roberts. Once she found something that worked, she wrote according to that formula and *only that formula*. Her body of work is massive but--and I say this with a certain degree of affection--if you've read one, you've read them all.

Her books read very much like stories written by the young teenage girls that star in them. The protagonist is beautiful and tortured, there are grotesque amounts of violence against women (almost exclusively at the hands of men), and the adults are always the bad guys, *especially* parents. There's death, sex, drama, and so, so much teenage angst.

They're garbage. But I like them. So sometimes I read them. And I'm clearly doing more reading than you are right now, otherwise, you wouldn't be here. So put THAT in your frappuccino and suck it.

But in all seriousness, there's no law that says you only have to read the highbrow stuff. Imagine telling someone who watches daytime talk shows that they're only allowed to watch [Masterpiece Theatre](#) and [Planet Earth](#) from now on. The world might be slightly less stupid but it wouldn't be nearly as colorful or fun. It's good to roll around in the mud once in a while.

Just, you know. All things in moderation. Be sure to supplement your trashy novel diet with some cognitively healthier options. Like *The Alchemist*. Everybody likes *The Alchemist*.

Quit Social Media

The fact that you probably found this blog post through my Twitter account may make this smell of hypocrisy but hear me out. I'm not saying you should cut ties with all of the internet and go live in the mountains (unless you want to, then you should absolutely do that and take me with you). But you should seriously, at the very absolute *least*, limit your use of social media, if not eliminate it entirely from your life. You have no idea how much of your time it's taking from you.

Social media fucks with the same part of your brain that gambling does. Every time you refresh Facebook, you're pulling the slot machine handle to see if you can "win" notifications. The unpredictability keeps you coming back for more. Things like Snapchat's streaks prey on our need to keep from "breaking the chain" of a routine. Social media is very carefully designed to

keep us using it as often as possible. [People spend an average of two hours on social media each day.](#) Teens spend as many as nine! *Nine!!*

But what would happen if you cut the cord from all those apps, or even just most of them? What would you do with all those free hours? Might I suggest you **READ A BOOK?**

I'd spent years wondering why I stopped reading after I graduated high school. It was like my reading time had slipped right through my fingers like [freshly-washed cotton candy](#) and I couldn't figure out where it went. It finally hit me when I was stuck in the psych ward a couple of years ago and didn't have my phone or internet access. You know what I was doing instead? Reading books. Because that's what I'd do when I didn't have to worry about social media all the time, like when I was in high school and didn't have a smartphone or social media (cuz they didn't exist back then).

Now, minus my Twitter account, I don't use social media. I read books instead. It's made me a much happier and better-adjusted person, too. I no longer have to think about the Kardashians or my relatives' racist opinions on sports mascots. **I am free.**



Dramatization of what deleting Facebook feels like.

Stop Making Excuses

If you really want to read more, you'll read more. It's just that simple. You'll find a way to do it that works within the framework of your life. Maybe you'll set aside an hour every day to read a book. Maybe you'll start listening to audiobooks at the gym. Maybe you'll challenge yourself to read a certain amount each week (I did that!). Fuck, start with comic books or graphic novels. *Those totally count.*

But no matter what you do, it's going to take effort on your part. Especially now that culturally we're so used to short-form reading and constant distractions. It's uncomfortable to sit and focus on one thing for long stretches of time because that's not how our world is structured anymore. Everything's immediate. Things are much faster and in your face than they were 20 years ago.

It's not going to feel good at first. The fact that you aren't doing 60 things at once is going to feel unnatural and like a profound waste of your time. But since when has reading ever been a waste of time? What would [LeVar Burton](#) or [Dolly Parton](#) say to such abject nonsense? Do you really wanna break their hearts believing that books aren't worth your valuable time?

At the end of the day, reading is a two-step process: Open book. Insert brain. There is no one on the planet who can't do that to some degree or another. Figure it out.

See you next week. Be good. Make stuff.

