

How to Read a Book

by Mortimer J. Adler

A printable to-do list of the most effective habits from this book. Check one off each day you do it.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

01 Inspect before you commit

For your next serious book, spend 20 minutes with the preface, contents, index, and final pages. Write one paragraph on what the book is about before reading chapter one.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

02 Write the book's unity

After the first full pass, state the whole book in one sentence. If you cannot, return to the structure instead of collecting more highlights.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

03 Build a terms ledger

Keep a short list of the author's key words and define how the author uses them. Do not assume familiar words carry familiar meanings.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

04 Delay disagreement

When you want to criticize, first write the author's argument in a form they would recognize. Then decide whether the issue is evidence, logic, completeness, or framing.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

05 Run a three-book inquiry

Pick one question you care about and read three authors on it. Compare their terms, claims, agreements, and silences before writing your own answer.