

Tree of Life



How to Read a Book

Course Outline
and
Test Book

How to Read a Book
Outline for Course of Study
Value: 1 credit

Introduction

It is fashionable these days to speak of reading the *Great Books*. You know the Great Books don't you? They're the "every thinking person wants to read; knows they should read; doesn't really know how to go about reading; can't understand them once they start, so they give up" kinds of books. These are the books with authors' names like Homer, Herodotus, Euclid, Virgil, St. Augustine, Luther, Shakespeare, Pascal, Rousseau, Melville, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn. They are not all books with which we might agree. Quite frankly we would find ourselves disagreeing with much that they say. However, they are the books that have shaped Western culture. *The Republic, The City of God, The Prince, Don Quixote, Paradise Lost, Candide, Faust*, and, of course, *The Holy Bible*. We recognise the titles. We may even have lingered for varying periods of time within their pages. However, very few of us have read these books. I mean *really read* them.

Why? These books are not easy reading. They push us and tax our faculties. They do not let us take the easy way out. We would just as soon catch the movie or read the Readers' Digest version. But, we must not. We must learn how to read so that we can find out for ourselves what they say; what the authors of these classics are saying to us.

The authors of the text for this course are not so concerned about reading a lot of books. In fact, they agree with Thomas Hobbes when he said, "If I read as many books as most men do, I would be as dull-witted as they are." Mr. Hobbes, humility aside, touches on a key point to being a good reader. We too often equate good reading with the volume of books read or the speed with which they are read. No, good reading is more than that. **Good reading is when the author and reader meet and the reader understands what the author is teaching.** It seems like a simple task when put in simple words. But is it so easy?

What is good reading? What kinds of skills are needed to read the Great Books? Is it possible for someone like yourself to acquire these skills? What benefit can you hope to gain from your efforts? What kind of books should you be reading? Are there books that should be avoided? These and other questions are answered in *How to Read a Book*.

On April 8, 1933, William Lyon Phelps, American educator and author, delivered the following radio broadcast. In it he discusses the value of owning books. As you read it, I hope you catch a vision for reading - not just a score of novels or newspapers, or magazines, or other "earthly" compositions; for while these are suitable to inform and/or entertain us, they cannot often be classified as great books. No, it is hoped that you begin the lifelong process of reading books that teach you about the world and, more importantly, something about yourself. Read well - not in quantity, but in quality.

Owning Books

by

William Lyon Phelps

(Taken from *The World's Greatest Speeches*, Copeland and Lamm editors)

Dover Publications 1973

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind; and we enjoy reading good books that belong to us much more than if they are borrowed. A borrowed book is like a guest in the house; it must be treated with punctiliousness, with a certain considerate formality. You must see that it sustains no damage; it must not suffer while under your roof. You cannot leave it carelessly, you cannot mark in it, you cannot turn down the pages, you cannot use it familiarly. And then, some day, although this is seldom done, you really ought to return it.

But your own books belong to you; you treat them with that affectionate intimacy that annihilates formality. Books are for use, not for show; you should own no book that you are afraid to mark up, or afraid to place on a table, wide open and face down. A good reason for marking favourite passages in books is that this practice enables you to remember more easily the significant sayings, to refer to them quickly, and then in later years, it is like visiting a forest where you once blazed a trail. You have a pleasure of going over the old ground, and recalling both the intellectual scenery and your own earlier self.

Everyone should begin collecting a private library in youth; the instinct of private property, which is fundamental in human beings, can here be cultivated with every advantage and no evils. One should have one's own bookshelves, which should not have doors, glass windows or keys; they should be free and accessible to the hand as well as the eye. The best of mural decorations is books; they are more varied in colour and appearance than any wallpaper, they are more attractive in design, and they have the prime advantage of being separate personalities, so that if you sit alone in a room in the firelight, you are surrounded with intimate friends. The knowledge that they are there in plain view is both stimulating and refreshing. You do not have to read them all. Most of my indoor life is spent in a room containing six thousand books; and I have a stock answer to the invariable question that comes from strangers. "Have you read all of these books?" "Some of them twice." This reply is both true and unexpected.

There are of course no friends like living, breathing, corporeal men and women; my devotion to reading has never made me a recluse. How could it? Books are of the people, by the people, for the people. Literature is the immortal part of history; it is the best and most enduring part of personality. But book-friends have this advantage over living friends; you can enjoy the most truly aristocratic society in the world whenever you want it. The great dead are beyond our physical reach, and the great living are usually almost as inaccessible; as for our personal friends and acquaintances, we cannot always see them. Perchance they are asleep, or away on a journey. But in a private library, you can at any moment converse with Socrates or Shakespeare or Carlyle or Dumas or Dickens or Shaw or Barrie or Galsworthy. And there is no doubt that in these books you see these men at their best. They wrote for you. They "laid themselves out," they did their ultimate best to entertain you, to make a favourable impression. You are necessary to them as an audience is to an actor; only instead of seeing them masked, you look into their inmost heart of heart.

How to Proceed Through This Course

How to Read a Book is not what one would call an “easy read”. Every attempt has been made, however, to break the material into manageable chunks for the student. In fact the entire course has been divided into lessons and given a numerical designation. *It cannot be inferred that each lesson will only take one day. In some cases this may be true, but on the whole the student should follow a general rule that each lesson should last as long as it takes him to understand the material well.* It is only then that he should move on to the next lesson.

While putting together this course, a decision was made to use a frequent number of tests and assignments. Since this is a “how to book”, this approach should help the student master all of the effective skills for a lifelong pursuit of good reading. The benefits to the student in the area of other course work will become obvious as the book is read and studied.

All tests and assignments will be equally weighted in determining the final grade for this course. Refer to the Lesson Outline often to insure that all work is being completed. Send each evaluation to us for grading. These are clearly marked in the Lesson Outline.

Lesson Outline

Lesson One

Take some time to inspect the text for this course. Read the cover - both front and back. Skim the table of contents. See how it is divided into headings and subheadings. Take note of the types of things that will be covered in the text. Read the preface. What does the author think is the reason a book like this is needed? Dip into the book. By this I mean that you should thumb through the text, reading short passages from time to time. Perhaps first and last paragraphs of chapters or other sections that catch your eye could be read. Do this in sequence to get an idea of how the authors write and what sort of style they use. You might also want to look at the index. You have now completed a crude sort of inspection of the book and should have more of an idea of what to expect from the course. You will learn more about Inspectional reading later. For now, put the book away. You've done enough for one day!

Lesson Two

First a word about marking in this book. It is a good idea to keep a pen, pencil, highlighter, and notebook handy as you work your way through this text. You need to forget everything your mother ever told you about marking in books! The authors recommend it and so do I. It is one of the keystones to active reading, particularly the reading of expository works.

Look again at the Table of Contents. Find the section on The Activity and Art of Reading. As you read through the chapter today, use the headings and subheadings to help you make notes and focus on the key ideas. Now turn to page 3 and read the chapter through once - quickly. Don't stop to make notes; however, you may want to star (*) passages that you think are important and will revisit later.

Read the passage more slowly a second time. Make notes, write in the margins, record your thoughts and reactions. Remember the outline in the Contents can be a useful guide to understanding the most important concepts.

When you think you are ready, remove **Test One** from the test packet. Complete the answers to the questions and send it to us for evaluation.

Lesson Three

Follow a similar procedure to the one outlined in *Lesson Two*. Check the Contents for the headings and subheadings outlined for *The Levels of Reading*. Skim through the chapter in one quick reading. Reread the chapter making notes, recording your thoughts and questions, and marking up your text as you go.

When you feel that you are ready, remove **Test Two** from the test packet, complete it, and send it to us for evaluation.

Lesson Four

It should be noted here that the procedure you followed for the first two chapters of the text will be pretty much standard for the course. The sequence of checking the headings and subheadings in the contents, skimming through the chapter, rereading for better understanding, and recording notes, thoughts, and questions will actually help you practice the skills needed to tackle whole books. To gain maximum benefit from your study, it is highly recommended that these steps not be skipped. They will be referred to from now on as **THE METHOD**. These will be the first two words that you see at the beginning of each lesson. Please work through the steps!

When you are satisfied that you are ready, remove **Test Three** from the test packet, complete it, and send it to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment One** from the test packet, complete it and send it to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment Two** from the test packet, complete it and send it to us for evaluation.

* It is not recommended that you do all three of the above evaluations on the same day. To derive maximum benefit, it is suggested that you do them on three consecutive days.

Lesson Five

Employ **THE METHOD** for material found in Chapter Four - *The Second Level of Reading: Inspectional Reading*. During your second reading, use the form titled **Assignment Three** found in the test packet to help you glean essential information found in this chapter. Send the completed form to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment Four** from the test packet and send it to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment Five** from the test packet and send it to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment Six** from the test packet and send it to us for evaluation.

Remove **Assignment Seven** from the test packet and send it to us for evaluation.

* It is not recommended that you do all **four** of the above evaluations on the same day. To derive maximum benefit it is suggested that you do them, distributed over a longer period of time.

Lesson Six

Employ **THE METHOD** for material found in Chapter Five - *A Demanding Reader*. When you think you have taken sufficient time to properly prepare, remove **Test Four**, complete it, and send it to us for evaluation.

Lesson Seven

You have now completed Part One of the text and should have a pretty good idea of the dimensions of reading with a detailed insight into the Elementary and Inspectional reading. Part Two of the text will guide you in the steps involved in Analytical Reading. You will, first of all, do an inspectional reading of Chapters 6 through 12. Make sure you look back at the Contents to help you get an overview of this section of the text. Before you do the inspectional reading, remove the form titled **Assignment Eight** from the test packet. As you read, fill in the blanks on the outline to insure that you have all the rules for the three stages of Analytical Reading. Send **Assignment Eight** to us for evaluation.

