

How to Read a Book

By

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I. The First Stage of Analytical Reading: Rules for Finding What a Book Is About: What is the book about as a whole?

- 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 author has tried to solve.

II. The Second Stage of Analytical Reading: Rules for Interpreting a Book's Contents: What is being said in detail, and how?

- 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.

III. The Third Stage of Analytical Reading: Rules for Criticizing a Book as a Communication of Knowledge: Is it true? and What of it?

A. General Maxims of Intellectual Etiquette

- 9 Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your interpretation of the book. (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say "I understand.")
- 10 Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.
- 11 Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.

B. Special Criteria for Points of Criticism

- 12 Show wherein the author is uninformed.
- 13 Show wherein the author is misinformed.
- 14 Show wherein the author is illogical.
- 15 Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

Note: Of these last four, the first three are criteria for disagreement. Failing in all of these, you must agree, at least in part, although you may suspend judgment on the whole, in light of the last point.