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How to Read a Book in Five Minutes?

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When you are engaged in a research thesis, you will normally have to understand a great deal of published material of various kinds. If you attempt literally to read all of this it will take you ages. Most likely, you simply will not have the time to do so on top of all of your other plans and responsibilities. So, you will have to be much more selective in your reading of most of it. For example, is it possible?

- Can you read a books, reports and articles quickly and effectively for research purposes?
- Can you get to the gist of the argument and pull out the material or details you want within minutes?

To answer these questions the following exercise can be helpful:

Pick-up a book of relevance to your research area or subject, one you have not read before. Taking no more than five minutes, one can summarize the key message (s) of the book that relate to your research question (s) and objective (s).

Source: *Adopted from Blaxter, et al. (2008).*

The title of the exercise "how to read a book in five minutes" actually means how to scan a book in five minutes. There is a huge collection of books in the library on each topic or the area of research, but the problem is, what is the best suitable book to read that will fulfill the purpose of the reader?

We need relevant material.

It is not the shortage of the material that is a problem; it is a matter of relevance of the material. So this exercise can help us to decide whether the book is relevant to what we are looking for or not. In just five minutes we can see if the book in our hand is relevant or not.

What not to choose or choose.

In reviewing the literature another problem that you have to face is what not to choose out of the material you are reading.

What is a book.

A book is a written work or composition that has been published (printed on pages bound together)

E- Book:

A book available in electronic form (e.g. for download from the internet.)

Parts of a book:

Following are the parts a book is generally divided into.

- **Title** (A general or descriptive heading for a section of a written work)
- **Subtitle** (Secondary or explanatory title)
- **Blurb** (A promotional statement (as found on the dust jackets of books)
- **Preface** (A short introductory essay preceding the text of a book)
- **Foreword** (A short introductory essay preceding the text of a book)
- **Table of contents** (A list of divisions (chapters or articles) and the pages on which they start)
- **References** (A short note recognizing a source of information or of a quoted passage)
- **Index** (An alphabetical listing of names and topics along with page numbers where they are discussed)
- **Glossary** (An alphabetical list of technical terms in some specialized field of knowledge; usually published as an appendix to a text on that field)
- **Heft** (The author is able to completely explain, explore or describe his/her perspective according to the title and subtitle in the book. It is judged by the heft/size of the book)
- **Text** : The detailed text of the book

So how can we read a book in five minutes, quickly and effectively?

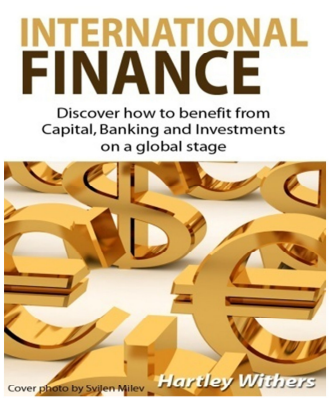
To answer these questions try the following exercise:

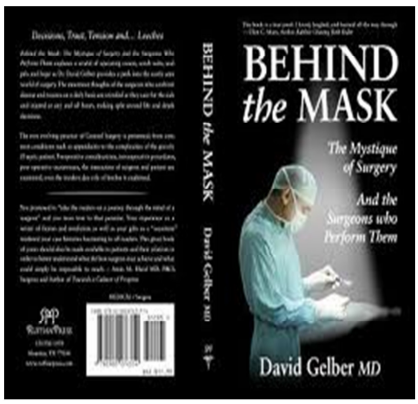
Each minute should be divided to the certain tasks

1ST MINTS

Judge by the cover

In the first minute you must try to have a glance at the cover of the book and try to judge what type of book it might be. The cover most of the times give you a good idea of what the book is about. Like in the following pictures of the covers you get a very clear idea that the first book has different currency signs on it, which means it belongs to the finance book family. The second book has a picture of man with a surgery mask and gloves, shows that it belongs to a medical family of books.





So we can say that even at a glance on the cover of the book we can gather what this book is about.

Secondly, you need to read the title of the book, including the sub title. The title and the sub title will give you a clear idea what type of book it is. The title will reflect the main area of the book, while the sub title is particular area of argument of the author. Looking at the title of the book 1 above "international Finance" shows that the book is about finance, while the sub-title "capital, banking and investment on a global stage" shows that it particularly explains the topics related to capital, banking and investments.

Thirdly try to make sense what do these three pieces of data tell you about the WHO – WHAT – WHEN and WHERE of the book?

Turn the book over.

Try to get the following information:

- Who wrote the blurbs (the "advance praise" in quotation marks on the back)
- Are they professors? Are they management sciences professors?
- Read the summary on the back. What does it tell you about the major THEMES of the book?
- What does it say about how this book is DIFFERENT from other books on the same topic?

All these things will tell you what is the quality of the book on a specific topic? Like if the blurb is written by someone well known and reliable person, related to the area of what the book is about then one can say that the quality and the text of information is likely to be useful. The summary will tell you what type of flow of information and how it has been used in the book.

Read the publication information

- The publication information can give you an idea about the quality of the book.
- When it was first published? Was it published during or shortly after the period it discusses?
- Who is its author and does s/he have other publications? If so, about what?

So in the first minute we can have a clear idea about the book if it is relevant to what you are looking for or not. If the book looks relevant in the first minute, you can move to the second minute to have a more clear idea if the book is relevant or not.

2ND MINUTE

In the second minute you have to read the table of contents as follows.

- Read the title of each chapter.
- Which of the chapters sound the most interesting/relevant to you?
- ***Re-read/recall your area of research***
- How do the major themes of your research area, relate to the major themes of this book?

For example the following Table of contents can give a clear idea what is going to be the text of the book.

- *Chapter 1: Risk Management – A Helicopter View*
- *Chapter 2: Corporate Risk Management – A Primer*
- *Chapter 3: Banks and their Regulators – The Research Lab for Risk Management?*

- *Chapter 4: Corporate Governance and Risk Management*
- *Chapter 5: A User-Friendly Guide to the Theory of Risk and Return*
- *Chapter 6: Interest-Rate Risk and Hedging with Derivative Instruments*
- *Chapter 7: From Value at Risk to Stress Testing*
- *Chapter 8: Asset-Liability Management*
- *Chapter 9: Credit Scoring and Retail Credit Risk Management*
- *Chapter 10: Commercial Credit Risk and the Rating of Individual Credits*
- *Chapter 11: New Approaches to Measuring Credit Risk*
- *Chapter 12: New Ways to Transfer Credit Risk- and their Implications*
- *Chapter 13: Operational Risk*
- *Epilogue: Trends in Risk Management*
- *Index*

So if we just read the table of content, we can say that for sure that the book is about risk analysis. You can also read a few lines of the topic you find interesting in the table of contents. Here again you have to see if the table of contents shows the relatedness of the book to what you are looking for then you can move to the further investigation in the third minute.

3RD MINUTE

After reading the table of contents you must read the foot notes and end notes of the book. This will give an idea of the sources used by the author to compile the book. There can be two main sources, the primary and the secondary sources. Again the quality of the sources will depict the quality of the text and the material inside the book.

The second step in the third minute is to flip through the book to see quickly, how many and what type of photos, tables, graphs and the diagrams are used to help in the explanation of the text. If you see that there are a lot of graphs and tables used in the book then that means it is a quantitative type of book, while if you notice less tables and graphs but more picture etc, this means the book is more of a qualitative type.

This activity in the third minute will help you analyze more if the book is relevant or not. This is because photos and graphs etc tend to be closely related to the book's main argument(s).

4TH MINUTE

In the forth minute first thing to do is to have a skimming at the introduction of the book. This is going to give the idea what this book is really about.

- Does the author say s/he is agreeing with other writers? Disagreeing?
- What is different about this book than others on the subject?
- Writing style of the author.

Secondly you must read the preface. The preface will lead you to the text of the book or the theme of the text. The preface will in brief, lead the writer what has been written in the book.

The third thing is to read the blurb which is a promotional statement (as found on the dust jackets of books. The blurb will give you the clue about the book that:

- Who is ready to write about the book? If the blurb writer is someone famous writer or a professor in a reputable university or not.
- What s/he write about it? What kind of praise the blurb writer is writing about the book.

The method is not that reliable because most of the time a selling technique is used with the blurb writing. As we know the blurb is the part of a book, and the author would not allow anyone to write the blurb, who may write it negatively.

Example

"Steve Robbins has truly pulled off what he said he would. Robbins has written a superb book that assembles evidence about some of the most useful information for managing people to achieve higher activity and morale. Instead of belaboring and embellishing one concept throughout the book, Robbins presents the best evidence from y of the leading management researchers. The book is eminently practical, yet common sense is contradicted where it is proved to be on. In synthesizing the most useful information available on 63 key topics, Steve Robbins has made a substantial contribution to practicing managers. Researchers too should dig into this book to find out what is really known about managing people."

— ANDREW J. DUBRIN, PH.D.
Professor of Management and Industrial Psychologist
Rochester Institute of Technology

By looking at the blurb above one can gather that the book is about the organizational behavior and the blurb writer is himself a PhD degree holder teaching at a university level at the time he wrote the book blurb.

5TH MINUTE

In the last minute the activities are even more important and effective, as it is the last minute to decide whether the book really belongs to the area you are interested in?

In the fifth minute keeping the key term in your mind go to the end of the book to glossary and check the definition of your key term/word. Here you can particularly see if the term's definition given in the book is relevant to what you are looking for or not.

Secondly again keeping the key term in mind, go to the index and look. Note the page number and go to the page in the book to read about the topic in detail. See if the topic explained in the book is relevant and meaningful to you or not.

Example

- *action research, 16–17*
- *aims and objectives, 56–57*
- *arithmetic mean, 127*
- *background research, 40–46*
- ***body language, 70, 76***
- *box-ticking, 64, 88*
- *budgets, 59–60*

Like in the above example you can see that the term "body language" is at page number 70 and 76. This is the quickest method to go to the relevant page to find about the required material in the book.

E-book Scanning:

Now days many a time we also have to read book in an electronic form, from a computer screen. To look for your key word in the E-book you can go for "Ctrl F" key and type the word. If the relevant word will be anywhere in the book the computer will automatically highlight it. If the word is written at more than one places, all the places of the word will be highlighted so you can easily scroll to the word to read about it.

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