



How to "Read" a Book in an Hour

« **Reply #9 on:** August 08, 2006, 05:35:46 PM »

Quote from: tt_wannabe on August 08, 2006, 04:53:22 PM

Do you really read a book in an hour?

Indeed I do--though to paraphrase a great American, it depends on what the definition of "read" is. Here's how you do it:

1. Create a clean space--a table, the book, paper and a writing utensil, and nothing else.
2. Read two academic reviews of the book you photocopied beforehand. Don't skip this step, these will tell you the book's perceived strengths and weakness. Allow five minutes for this.
3. Read the introduction, carefully. A good intro will give you the book's thesis, clues on the methods and sources, and thumbnail synopses of each chapter. Work quickly but take good notes (with a bibliographic citation at the top of the page.) Allow twenty minutes here.
4. Now turn directly to the conclusion and read that. The conclusion will reinforce the thesis and have some more quotable material. In your notes write down 1-2 direct quotes suitable for using in a review or literature review, should you later be assigned to write such a beast. Ten to fifteen minutes.
5. Turn to the table of contents and think about what each chapter likely contains. You may be done--in many cases in grad school the facts in any particular book will already be familiar to you, what is novel is the interpretation. And you should already have that from the intro and conclusion. Five minutes.
6. (Optional) Skim 1-2 of what seem to be the key chapters. Look for something clever the author has done with her or his evidence, memorable phrases, glaring weaknesses--stuff you can mention and sound thoughtful yourself when it is your turn to talk in the seminar room. Ten minutes, max.
7. Put the notes and photocopied review in a file folder and squirrel it away. These folders will serve as fodder for future assignments, reviews of similar books, lectures, grant applications, etc.
8. Miller time. Meet some friends and tell them the interesting things you just learned (driving it deeper it your memory).

The above works better with some books than others, but will generally do the trick. Another good technique to have is paragraph surfing. Read the first sentence in each paragraph--and nothing else. After a few disconcerting minutes, it become surprisingly easy to make sense out of a book this way, and it is fast.