

# ROMAN READING:

## 5 Practical Skills for Transforming Your Life through Literature

Nick Senger



*Change your life one page at a time...*

© 2007 Nick Senger

Copyright holder is licensing this under the Creative Commons License, Attribution 2.5

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

This ebook is available for free by visiting <http://www.romanreading.com>

You have permission to email this, post this, print this and pass it along for free to anyone you like, as long as you make no changes to its content. Please share it for free with as many people as possible. However, the right to sell it is reserved.

**Thanks to all of my students over the years; you taught me more about literature than I could have learned on my own. I dedicate this book to you and to all those I have yet to meet.**

**For best viewing, select “Full Screen” from the menu.**

*Books act like a developing fluid on film. That is, they bring into consciousness what you didn't know you knew.*

**--Clifton Fadiman**

*Nobody can decide for himself whether he is going to be a human being. The only question open to him is whether he will be an ignorant undeveloped one or one who has sought to reach the highest point he is capable of attaining.*

**--Robert Hutchins**

## **Foreword: Making the world a more literate place**

---

### **Change your life one page at a time.**

THIS BOOK IS FOR ANYONE WHO IS TIRED OF LIVING LIFE ON THE SURFACE, tired of letting cable news or daytime talk shows tell you what to believe, how to live, and what to think. It's for people who want to learn how to read literature or better understand their book club's latest selection. It's also for those who've always wanted to read great books but never thought they could. It's about changing your life one page at a time.

It's for readers and those who teach reading: teachers; home schooling parents; members of reading groups; elementary, high school and

college students; independent learners. It's long enough to cover the entire process of reading but short enough to be read in one sitting.

Show it to teachers; give it to students; tell your homeschool association or reading group about it; make a copy for the local library or community college. People have been using the skills in this book for hundreds of years, and no one who practices them will be disappointed.

Send it to everyone you can think of. It's free. Attach it in an email or tell them they can download it at [www.romanreading.com](http://www.romanreading.com). You can even print it out for them. Together let's make the world a more literate place.

**Three questions about reading my students always ask:**

1. Why should I read literature?
2. How can someone like me read something so difficult?
3. Which books will change my life?

**This book answers those questions.**

## Reading a book is like having a conversation with a neighbor.



REMEMBER THE CHARACTER WILSON on the TV show *Home Improvement*? Whenever Tim needed advice or a different perspective on things, he stood at his fence and talked with his next-door neighbor Wilson. Wilson was intelligent and wise, and though Tim didn't understand everything Wilson said, he understood enough to get through his problem. Reading literature is like having your very own Wilson next door. You won't always understand everything you read, but you'll get something valuable every time.

Books are like neighbors, and your personal library is your neighborhood. Take a look at your bookshelves. What kind of neighborhood are you living in? Are you in a slum or in the suburbs? Who are your neighbors? Are they trash talkers or shrewd sages? If you live next door to Socrates, then invite him to dinner every night. If you live next to Dan Brown, then put your house on the market.

This book is about how to meet neighbors like Socrates, Descartes, Shakespeare, Austen, or any of the great authors whose ideas have shaped the world. You'll find out how to meet them, talk to them and learn from them.

*I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.*

**–Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy***

## **Read a book and you'll never be lonely again.**

---



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WAS ONCE ASKED what kind of man we should feel most sorry for. He answered, “A lonesome man on a rainy day who does not know how to read.” He understood what many people don’t realize about books—that behind every book is a person, and if you know how to read—and read well—then you don’t ever have to be alone.

When you read a book—no matter how old or complicated it is, no matter how many pages it has—you are simply sitting down to have a chat with a neighbor who’s always home. A book is a friend who’s

always ready with a story or some advice. And if your friend is named Tolstoy or Shakespeare, then the stories are going to be transforming as well as entertaining. If your friend is named Plato or Aquinas, then the advice is liable to be life-changing.

Books are like friends who are always around when you need them. That's because they transcend space and time. You and I are in each other's company at this very moment—even though we're physically not in the same room—because our minds have met by sharing the ideas contained here. Neither of us is alone. This book has crossed the boundaries of time and space and brought us together. We're both thinking about the same thing: how literature can transform our lives.

## The secret to reading

---



NONE OF THE OTHER THINGS IN THIS BOOK MATTER unless you understand this: If you want to learn to read then you must read. That is the secret to reading, and that is the only secret worth knowing. Everything else is a distraction from that one fundamental truth. To read better you must read more. All the time. Every day.

There are no shortcuts to becoming a better reader, just as there are no shortcuts to becoming a better swimmer, free-throw shooter, or dancer. You've got to swim, shoot free throws, and dance. You've got to read.

It's like Thomas Edison said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

But who wants to sweat for nothing? That's what can happen if you just dive in without any help. Swimmers, basketball players and dancers have to practice to get better, but they also need coaching. A coach takes a person's desire and effort and directs it in an efficient and productive way.

### **Your own personal reading coach**

Think of me as your reading coach. I'll show you the five skills that will allow you to read any author, no matter how difficult. And if you remember the acronym **ROMAN** then you'll never forget these skills.

But first there are two commonly held assumptions or myths about reading that can undermine your desire to read. After debunking them we'll get right to the heart of **ROMAN** reading.

*No one would expect to know how to repair an automobile engine without training, involving both theory and practice. If you learn to 'read' without understanding what good reading involves, you learn to read poorly...*

**--Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, *How to Read a Paragraph***

## **Myths about Reading Literature**

- 1. I don't have enough time to read.**
- 2. I'm not smart enough or educated enough to read great books.**

## **Reading myth #1: I don't have enough time to read.**

### **Truth #1: Reading literature takes no more time than anything else.**



AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN DAVID McCULLOUGH once explained just how much a person could read if they spent as much time with books as they did with television. The average person, he said, watches four hours of TV a day, and reads at a rate of 250 words per minute. If those four hours of TV were spent reading, in one week a person could read all the poems of T.S. Eliot and Maya Angelou, two plays by Thornton Wilder, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Book of Psalms*.

In the second week, he continued, a person could read all of *Moby-Dick* and make good headway on *The Brothers Karamazov*.

We have enough time to read; what we need is commitment. Spend even half of your TV time reading and watch your life change before your eyes.

**This week try an experiment:** Set a good book on top of your remote control, and the next time you reach for the remote grab the book instead and start reading.

## **Myth #2: I'm not smart enough to read great books.**

---

**Truth #2: Reading literature is simple and intuitive. Anyone can do it.**



MOST PEOPLE HAVE THE FALSE IDEA that you have to have some kind of college degree in English to read literature. That's ridiculous. Did Dante or Dickens or Dostoyevsky write for the intellectual elite? Of course not. They wrote for you and me.

There is no great mystery to reading literature except to the inexperienced. To the uninitiated, anything is mysterious or difficult at first. Watching an opera, refinishing a table, sewing a quilt,

rebuilding a car engine—all of these things seem complicated and baffling to the outsider. Reading is no different.

But if you're reading this then you've already mastered the most difficult part of reading—decoding the words. Say a little thank you right now to Mrs. Boots, or Sr. Mary Depner, or your mother, or whoever it was who first taught you to read. The rest is simple.

Anyone can do it.

## **ROMAN** Reading: The simple way to read literature

---



*The Young Cicero Reading* – Vincenzo Foppa

**R**ead the book

**O**utline the book

**M**ark the pages

**A**sk the right questions

**N**ame your experiences

## READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME

---

### **A word about this process:**

FIRST, THESE SKILLS ARE NOTHING NEW: **Read, Outline, Mark, Ask, Name.**

They've been practiced for hundreds of years. What I've tried to do is make them easier to remember through the acronym **ROMAN**. But the process isn't a step-by-step procedure, like following a recipe or putting together a new entertainment center. You can follow it from beginning to end (especially if you've never read this way before), but eventually you'll discover your own way to learn from books.

Second, don't be discouraged if it seems like a lot of work just to read a book. Remember that only a small percentage of books deserve

**ROMAN** reading. But the ones that *do* deserve this kind of reading are more than worth the effort.

Finally, don't forget the secret to reading: to read better you must read *more*. If **ROMAN** reading intimidates you, then set it aside for awhile and just read, read, read. Eventually you'll come to a point where you're ready to go deeper—and that's when you can return to **ROMAN** reading and give it a try.

*Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.*

**--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden***

*The great majority of the several million books that have been written in the Western tradition alone—more than 99 percent of them—will not make sufficient demands on you for you to improve your skill in reading.*

**--Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book***

**READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME**

---

**A lesson from high school**

I FOUND MY MOM'S COPY OF *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* when I was fifteen years old and read it in a week, completely caught up in Tom Joad's journey. Two years later I had to read it in high school, chapter by chapter, study question by study question, vocabulary word by vocabulary word. It was utter torture. I couldn't believe this was the same book I had read and loved.

The *Grapes of Wrath* I had read on my own was one continuous story, and reading it was like stepping into a dream. In fact, that's what John

Gardner says a novel is, “an organized and fictional dream that will eventually fill the reader’s mind.”

But the book I read in high school was a chopped up mess of interruptions and teacher-imposed interpretations. I think back often to that experience as I look at my own teaching, and the one lesson it taught me is that a book is meant to be read straight through first, with as little interruption as possible.

**Read the book all the way through first.**

THE FIRST TIME YOU READ A BOOK, read it all the way through without stopping to think too much. Enjoy the book. If it’s a novel, let yourself sink into the “fictional dream.” Don’t worry about looking up words

you don't know, or trying to figure out what the author is saying. Just get into the story and the characters as much as you can.

Do you know Rick Steves, the travel guy from public television? Rick advises his viewers not to travel as tourists, but to “go native” and act like citizens of the country they visit. That's also great advice for readers. When you read a book that takes place in a foreign location, or in the past, or in an imaginary setting, try to imagine that you live there. Be at home in Middle-earth, or Troy, or nineteenth century England.

The more you imagine yourself in the story, the more it will move you emotionally, which is what the initial reading is all about.

## Tips for the First Reading of a Novel

1. **Be open-minded and enthusiastic. Read with passion.**
2. **Use your imagination as much as you can to picture what is happening. Think of the story as a dream you might be having, and get lost in it.**
3. **Read to find out what happens to the characters, not to find the theme or meaning of the story.**
4. **Hold off judging the book until you really understand it.**

**Summarize the book in one sentence.**

ONCE YOU'VE FINISHED THE BOOK, take a break and think about it for awhile. What was it about? Could you tell your friends the story in one sentence? Try writing one sentence to summarize it; write it inside the book, in the empty spaces in the front or back.

For example, if you read *The Odyssey* you might write the following sentence in the front of the book:

**This is the story of the challenges Odysseus faced on his return home from the Trojan War, and of how he and his son dealt with the men who tried to take advantage of his absence.**

If you read Plato's *Apology* you might come up with something like this:

**Socrates tries unsuccessfully to defend himself against charges that he corrupts the young and worships strange gods.**

Creating sentences like these helps you see the whole book in one quick glance. Writing them inside the book makes them handy and easy to find.

**READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME**

---

**A book is like a clock.**

WHEN I WAS ABOUT TEN, my dad gave me an old alarm clock to play with. The first thing I did was take it apart and look at all the pieces. I wanted to understand it, to figure out how it worked. When I saw all the gears and springs and coils, I realized it was more complicated than I'd first thought. A lot of design had gone into it.

A piece of literature is like a clock. It's generally more complicated than you think, and it has a grand design that needs to be uncovered if you want to know what it means. That's the purpose of outlining.

## Outlining

OUTLINING IS NOTHING MORE THAN COUNTING AND NAMING the parts of a book. Most of the time the author will have already divided the book for you. Check the table of contents. Most novels can be broken into one, two, three or four parts. Very few novels have more than four, and most have three.

Once you've discovered the main parts, write them down like you would an outline, numbering them. You can write them on the table of contents page or inside the front or back cover.

For instance, if you were reading *The Fellowship of the Ring* you might divide it into these two major parts:

- I. The story of the Ring and the journey to Rivendell
- II. The journey from Rivendell to Amon Hen where the Fellowship is broken

Tolkien has already divided the book into Book I and Book II; your job is to notice the two parts and briefly describe what happens. Just as you summarize the entire book in one sentence, now you summarize each of the parts.

## **Tips for Dividing a Book into Its Major Parts**

- 1. If an author has already divided his or her book into parts, use those for the beginning of your outline.**
- 2. If there is a table of contents, look at it and try to group the chapters together into fewer parts.**

**Outlining continued: Break the parts into smaller parts.**

ONCE YOU'VE BROKEN THE BOOK INTO BIG CHUNKS you can divide each part into smaller parts. It's like using Google Earth and zooming in on the Eiffel Tower. At first you see the whole earth, then Europe, then France, then Paris, and finally the Eiffel Tower itself. As you zoom in, you get a better perspective of where everything fits and how it's all related.

You can write your outline in the front or back of the book, or you can number the parts on the pages themselves. With a longer book, or one that's more difficult, keep dividing the parts into smaller parts until you begin to understand it better.

Using *The Fellowship of the Ring* again as our example, your outline might begin something like this:

- I. The story of the Ring and the journey to Rivendell
  - A. An Unexpected Party: Bilbo celebrates his birthday by leaving the Shire and bequeathing his ring and his other possessions to Frodo.
  - B. The Shadow of the Past: Frodo finds out that his ring is Sauron's One Ring, and he decides to leave the Shire in order to save the other hobbits.

You might think outlining takes a long time, but you'd be surprised at how quickly it goes. Outlining a book like *The Fellowship of the Ring* takes less than an hour once you've read the book, and after you've done a few outlines you could probably do it in half an hour.

*It's not how many books you get through, it's how many books get through you.*

**--Mortimer J. Adler**

**READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME**

---

**A good reader is like a crime scene investigator.**

AFTER A CRIME, THE CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATOR ARRIVES and searches for forensic evidence. She puts a little flag by the mud on the kitchen floor. He takes a picture of the smudged fingerprint on the door handle. All of the clues need to be discovered collected, and tagged so that someone can figure out what it all means.

To be a good reader you need to be a crime scene investigator. You search through the book looking for details and patterns that will help you figure out what the author means. And, like a good investigator,

you **mark** all of the evidence so that you can examine it again and again in case your theories change. That means you have to write in your books.

**Writing in books is not sacrilegious.**

THOREAU ONCE SAID, “Books are the treasured wealth of the world,” and he was right. But books aren’t valuable because they’re printed on gold pages. Books are valuable because of the ideas they contain and because of their ability to inspire, educate and move us emotionally. When you write in a book it actually increases in value, because where there used to be only one person’s ideas present, now there are two, the author’s and yours. Don’t let a false reverence for the paper and binding prevent you from gaining the real treasure: the ideas within.

## How to Mark a Book



FIRST, MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A GOOD PEN. Not a pencil. Not a highlighter. A pen. Pencils are too hard to see against the off-white pages, and you can't write words in the margin with a highlighter.

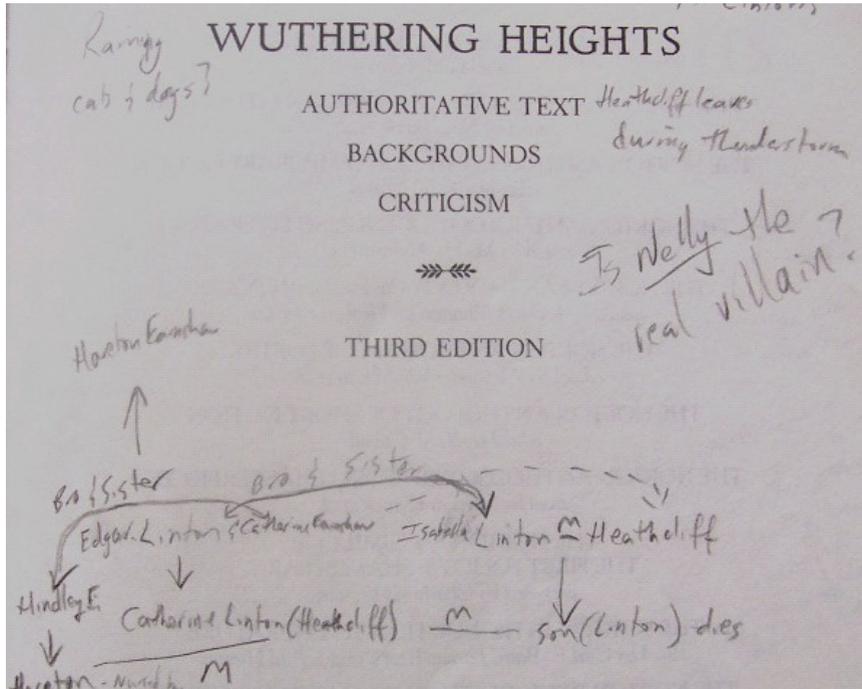
The choice of a pen is very personal, but I prefer to use a green Sanford Uniball with the Microfine point (.5 mm). The green color stands out brightly, and the fine point gives me the control I want so I can write in the margins and around the words themselves. And the Uniball doesn't bleed through the paper.

Once you have the right pen, read through the book again, this time more slowly and deliberately. When you come across a sentence or paragraph that's so well written it takes your breath away, underline it. If something puzzles you, draw a question mark in the margin next to it. When you start to notice the author use the same kinds of words over and over, circle them. Use your pen to keep track of anything that will help you understand the book better.

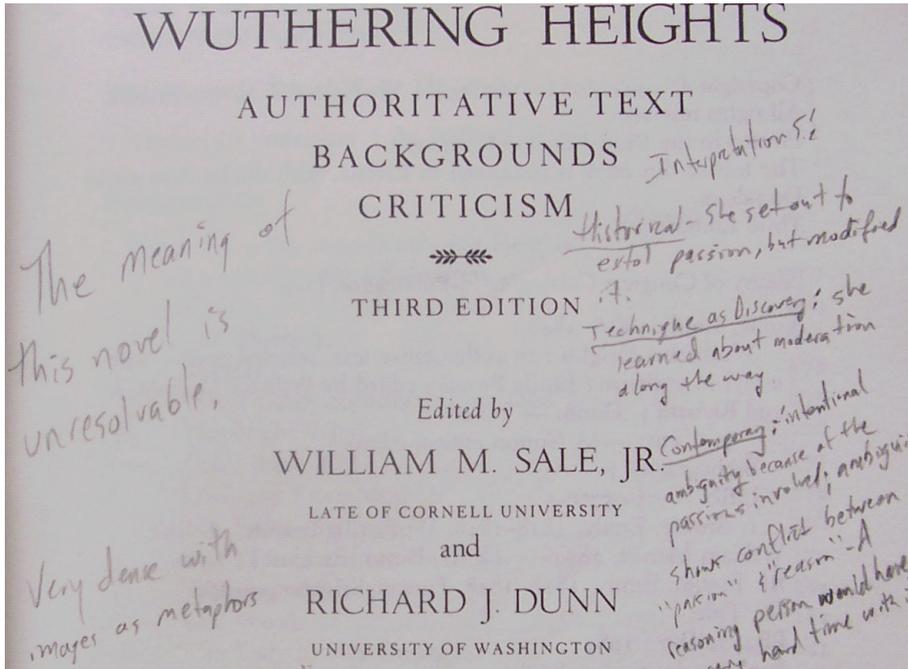
Here's where outlining really starts to pay off. All the outlining you've done has loaded your subconscious with the book's main ideas and concepts, so that when you reread the book to mark it up you'll notice the important things more easily.

Besides just circling words or underlining sentences, you should write questions and comments in the margins and in the empty spaces at the beginning and end of chapters. No question is too dumb, no comment too obvious.

You can also use the white spaces at the front and back of books to make notes. I've used those spaces to make family trees, write questions, and record my conclusions or interpretations. The title pages of my copy of *Wuthering Heights* illustrate the kinds of notes you can make:



Notice the family tree and the question about Nelly.



More interpretations and comments from Wuthering Heights

By writing questions and comments in your book you're creating a chronicle of your mind at this stage of your life. When you reread the book years later you'll have a snapshot of the person you were at the time you first read the book, and you'll be able to see your growth as a reader and as a person.

Marking a book is your part of the conversation with the author. It keeps you actively reading and responding to the author's ideas. Remember, reading is a meeting of the minds with no dependence on space or time.

**READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME**

---

**Ask the right questions.**

SOCRATES WAS A GREAT QUESTIONER. He didn't take anything for granted, and examined everything. He once said that if he had any kind of wisdom at all, it was in knowing how much he didn't know. That's exactly the right attitude for a reader to have. We're not used to asking questions. We're used to sitting in front of a TV set. Most of what we watch or read doesn't challenge our intellect at all so reading great literature can seem like a lot of work at first. But that's exactly the reason we need to read great books.

A book like *Don Quixote* will challenge you to question reality; Aristotle's *Ethics* raises questions about happiness and friendship. Some books, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, are almost unintelligible. You've got to wrestle with the ideas in books like these to grow and develop intellectually. That means asking questions and searching for answers.

### **Two Kinds of Questions**

THERE ARE ONLY TWO KINDS OF QUESTIONS that you really need to ask when you read literature: "What does it mean?" and "What difference does it make?"

## What Does it Mean?

A GOOD READER IS ALWAYS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT exactly what an author means. If you've done a good job marking up a book then the questions will come naturally: Why does Dante write that purgatory has seven terraces? Does Cervantes want us to think that Don Quixote is really insane, or are we supposed to think he's just acting?

Make sure you get your answers from the book. If you think the seven terraces of purgatory match the seven deadly sins then you'd better be able to find those seven sins in the book somewhere.

Just as you become a crime scene investigator when you mark the "evidence" in a book, you become a prosecuting attorney building a case

by trying to answer your questions. Sometimes you might mistake your own opinion for what the author meant. Going back to the book to find your answer keeps you honest.

### **What Difference Does it Make?**

ONE REASON WE READ BOOKS IS TO CHANGE OUR LIVES. Once you've done your best at trying to understand a book, what does it mean to you? Do you agree with the author? If so, how will your life change? If not, why not?

Chances are you'll probably never get any final answers to your questions, but you will understand the world a little more. As Clifton

Fadiman put it, “We all die uneducated...But at least we will not feel quite so lost, so bewildered.”

*Nothing is to remain undiscussed. Everybody is to speak his mind. No proposition is to be left unexamined.*

**--Robert Hutchins**

**READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME**

---

**The Chosen**

I'LL NEVER FORGET THE TIME I BROKE DOWN CRYING while reading Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*. I was home alone reading on the couch when the climactic scene between Danny and his father struck something deep inside me. I closed the book and just sat in silence while the tears streamed down my cheeks. I was twenty-seven years old at the time.

## **Naming your experiences**

Literature has the power to move you emotionally, spiritually and intellectually, and it's vital not to forget what you've learned. Naming your experiences means writing down your discoveries and reactions. It's like keeping a travel diary, only the journey you take is within your heart, soul and mind.

You can record your thoughts in several different ways: a spiral notebook, a moleskin journal, a computer file. If you want to contribute to the ongoing conversation of literature, start a blog and share your literary journey with the world. That's why I started [\*The Literary Compass\*](#). In the appendix you'll find a list of blogs by other people who are sharing their discoveries with the rest of us.

## Commonplace Books

ANOTHER GREAT WAY TO CHRONICLE YOUR LITERARY ADVENTURE is by keeping a commonplace book. Commonplace books have been used since the late Middle Ages as a way for readers to keep track of meaningful quotations or sayings from the books they read.

My commonplace book began as a fancy notebook but I soon transferred all of my quotations to a computer file. Most of the quotes you see scattered through these pages came from my commonplace book.

After you finish a book, take some time to copy down the memorable phrases or sentences that you came across as you read. It'll end up becoming your own reference book of pithy wisdom and maybe you'll hand it on to your children someday.

*How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?*

**--E. M. Forster**

## READ OUTLINE MARK ASK NAME

---

### One Page at a Time

Reading literature is not a mystery. It's a skill that takes practice, just like anything else. Sure, some people are naturally better at it than others, but everyone can do it. Everyone *should* do it.

The important thing is to begin. Now. Pick something—anything—and read it. Change your life one page at a time.

*How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!*

**--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden***

## Afterword: Where to Begin

---

### The Best Translation



SOMEONE ONCE ASKED AN EMINENT BIBLICAL SCHOLAR, “What’s the best translation of the Bible?” The scholar answered, “The one you’ll read.” I’d like to use the same advice here. The best place to begin using the **ROMAN** reading process is with a book you’ll finish. In Appendix C I’ve given you my personal reading list of classic literature, and I think it’s a good one, but one thing I’ve learned in speaking and teaching about books is that when it comes to what’s worth reading everyone has an opinion. A strong opinion. An opinion they’re willing to defend with

swords, clubs and other less conventional weapons like staplers and letter openers.

So use my reading list as a place to start, but don't send me any angry emails about leaving your favorite book off the list, or about having too many men or European writers on it. It's my list and I like it, and if it helps you, great. If not, I won't be insulted. Besides, I didn't really write the list, I simply compiled it from thirteen other lists of great literature.

I took thirteen lists of great books (mostly from the Western tradition) and I tallied which books were on the most lists. Only one book made it on all thirteen lists: Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Does that mean it's the greatest book ever written? Probably not. However, it's probably worth **ROMAN** reading (though I wouldn't recommend starting with it).

### **Begin Where You Are.**

IF YOU'RE NOT A HABITUAL READER, START SMALL, maybe with a short story. Any stories by Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant or Leo Tolstoy would be good places to begin. Practice with the shorter pieces then gradually work your way up to book-length works.

If reading comes pretty easy to you but now you're ready to really dig in and learn, begin at the beginning: Homer, Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, the early classics.

Maybe you're in a reading group and everyone wants to read something more modern. You can use **ROMAN** reading for authors like Amy Tan, Cormac McCarthy or Toni Morrison.

Begin where you are.

*Books are the compasses and telescopes and sextants and charts which others have prepared to help us navigate the dangerous seas of human life.*

**--Jesse Lee Bennett**

## Spread the word!

**Here's how you can help transform the world through literature:**

1. Share this book with a friend.
2. Visit the **ROMAN** Reading website at [www.romanreading.com](http://www.romanreading.com) for ongoing tips and encouragement as you continue your reading journey.
3. Download our other resources and sign up for the free **ROMAN** Reading newsletter at FreeIQ: <http://freeiq.com/nsenger>

**Together we can change lives one page at a time.**

## Appendix A: Summary of ROMAN Reading

---

- **Read** the book all the way through first, as continuously as you can, then write a one-sentence summary of it.
- **Outline** the book by numbering and naming the major parts, and then the smaller parts within those.
- **Mark** the book by identifying details and patterns that help you understand the author's meaning. Write questions in the margins.
- **Ask** the two all-important questions: "What does it mean?" and "What difference does it make?"
- **Name** your experiences by writing them in a journal; keep a commonplace book of great quotations.

## Appendix B: Resources

---

### Websites:

- [ROMAN Reading](#) – the official website of the book; check in often for tips and resources for teachers, reading groups and anyone wanting to transform their life through literature
- [The Literary Compass 101 Essential Websites for Readers of Literature](#) – a plethora of great reader sites
- [Nick's List of Great Literature](#) – a hyperlinked version of the reading list found in this book
- [Manchegan Madness](#) – named in honor of Don Quixote of La Mancha, this blog chronicles the quirks and habits of obsessive readers

## Reader's Blogs

- [Classical Bookworm](#)
- [A Reader's Journal](#)
- [So Many Books](#)

## Books

Note: Clicking on book titles will open a page on Amazon.com.

- [\*How to Read a Book\*](#) – Mortimer Adler
- [\*The New Lifetime Reading Plan\*](#) – Clifton Fadiman and John S. Major

## Appendix C: Nick's List of Great Literature

---

This list was compiled by looking at thirteen lists of great books and counting the number of lists each book appeared on. Here are the original thirteen lists:

- Mortimer Adler - from *How to Read a Book*
- Thomas Aquinas College Reading List
- Harold Bloom - *The Western Canon*
- Columbia Reading List
- Cifton Fadiman - *The New Lifetime Reading Plan*
- Martin Seymour-Smith - *100 Most Influential Books Ever Written*
- St. John's College Reading List
- De Bary and Bloom - *Approaches to the Asian Classics*
- Barbara Stoler Miller - *Masterworks of Asian Literature*
- Kenneth Rexroth - *Classics Revisited*
- Philip Ward - *A Lifetime's Reading: The World's 500 Greatest Books*
- Anthony Burgess - *99 Novels: The Best in English Since 1939*
- Kenneth Funsten - *100 Books for the Modern Person*

## Epics and Fiction

### 12 Lists

*Don Quixote* - Cervantes

*Iliad* - Homer

*Aeneid* - Virgil

### 11 Lists

*Gargantua and Pantagruel* - Rabelais

### 10 Lists

*Odyssey* - Homer

*Gulliver's Travels* - Swift

### 9 Lists

*War and Peace* - Tolstoy

*Candide* - Voltaire

8 Lists

*The Brothers Karamazov* - Dostoyevsky

*Tom Jones* - Fielding

*Paradise Lost* - Milton

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* - Twain

7 Lists

*Pride and Prejudice* - Austen

*The Canterbury Tales* - Chaucer

*Divine Comedy* - Dante

*The Tale of Genji* - Murasaki Shikibu

*Mahabharata* - Vyasa

6 Lists

*Emma* - Austen

*Robinson Crusoe* - Defoe

*Crime and Punishment* - Dostoyevski

*Middlemarch* - Eliot

*The Trial* - Kafka

*Moby Dick* - Melville  
*Nineteen Eighty-four* - Orwell  
*The Red and the Black* - Stendhal  
*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* - Sterne  
*The Ramayana* - Valmiki  
*To the Lighthouse* - Woolf  
*The Story of the Stone* - Cao Xueqin

#### 5 Lists

*Pilgrim's Progress* - Bunyan  
*The Stranger* - Camus  
*Pickwick Papers* - Dickens  
*The Sound and the Fury* - Faulkner  
*Madame Bovary* - Flaubert  
*Ulysses* - Joyce  
*The Castle* - Kafka  
*Lolita* - Nabokov  
*Remembrance of Things Past* - Proust  
*Fathers and Sons* - Turgenev

## Non-Fiction

### 13 Lists

*History of the Peloponnesian War* - Thucydides

### 12 Lists

*Ethics* - Aristotle

*The Histories* - Herodotus

*Essays* - Montaigne

*Republic* - Plato

### 11 Lists

*Poetics* - Aristotle

*Of the Nature of Things* - Lucretius

### 10 Lists

*Confessions* - St. Augustine

*The Prince* - Machiavelli

*Apology* - Plato

9 Lists

*Discourse on Method* - Descartes

8 Lists

*Politics* - Aristotle

*Leviathan* - Hobbes

*Meditations* - Marcus Aurelius

*On Liberty* - Mill

*Pensees* - Pascal

*Phaedo* - Plato

7 Lists

*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* - Gibbon

*Symposium* - Plato

*Parallel Lives* - Plutarch

6 Lists

*The Life of Samuel Johnson* - Boswell

*The Origin of Species* - Darwin

*The Federalist Papers*

*Pragmatism* - James

*Second Treatise on Government* - Locke

*The Communist Manifesto* - Marx

*Thus Spake Zarathustra* - Nietzsche

*Crito* - Plato

*Confessions* - Rousseau

*The Pillow Book* - Sei Shonagon

*Ethics* - Spinoza

5 Lists

*The Analects* - Confucius

*In Praise of Folly* - Erasmus

*Elements* - Euclid

*The Interpretation of Dreams* - Freud

*Critique of Pure Reason* - Kant

*Tao te Ching (Daodejing)* - Lao-Tzu  
*The Book of Mencius* - Mencius  
*Areopagitica* - Milton  
*Beyond Good and Evil* - Nietzsche  
*Meno* - Plato  
*Enneads* - Plotinus  
*Records of the Grand Historian* - Sima Qian  
*Wealth of Nations* - Smith  
*Annals* - Tacitus  
*Summa Theologica* - Aquinas  
*Walden* - Thoreau  
*Democracy in America* - de Tocqueville

## Drama

### 9 Lists

*The Orestia* - Aeschylus

*Faust* - Goethe

### 8 Lists

*Antigone* - Sophocles

*Oedipus Rex* - Sophocles

### 7 Lists

*Complete Works* - Shakespeare

### 6 Lists

*Bacchae* - Euripides

*Hippolytus* - Euripides

### 5 Lists

*The Clouds* - Aristophanes

*Waiting for Godot* - Beckett

*Uncle Vanya* - Chekhov

*Sakuntala* - Kalidasa

*Tartuffe* - Molière

*Oedipus at Colonnus* - Sophocles

**About the author:**

NICK SENGER DEVELOPED THE IDEA of **ROMAN** Reading to help his students learn to read more effectively. Nick is a writer, speaker, and award-winning Catholic schoolteacher.

Since 1990, he has dedicated himself to teaching people the value of reading literature.

You can reach him at [literarycompass@gmail.com](mailto:literarycompass@gmail.com).