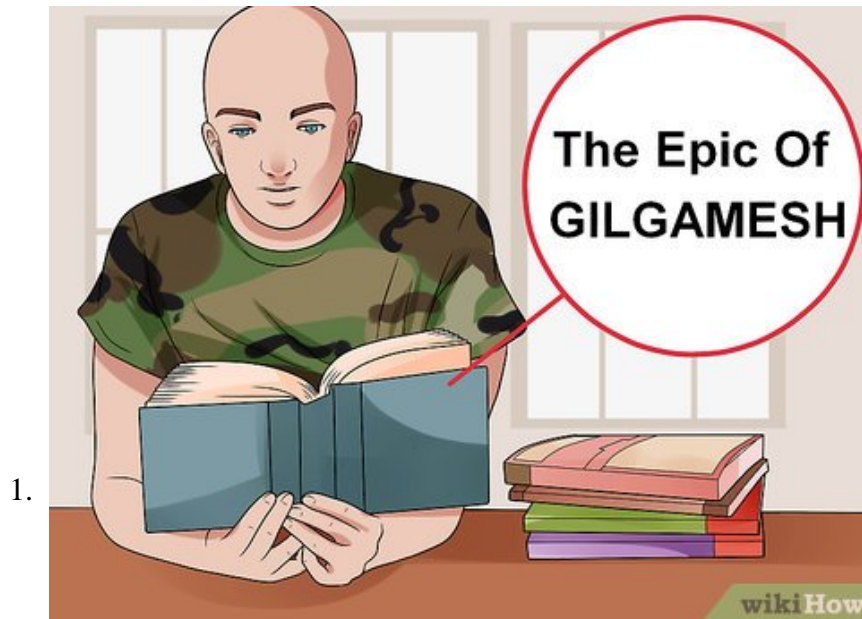


How to Be Well Read

If you want to be well-read, then, in the words of William Faulkner, you'll have to 'Read, read, read. Read everything...' You can start at the very beginning, or just make your way down an eclectic list of books that you'd like to read...

Part 1 of 3:

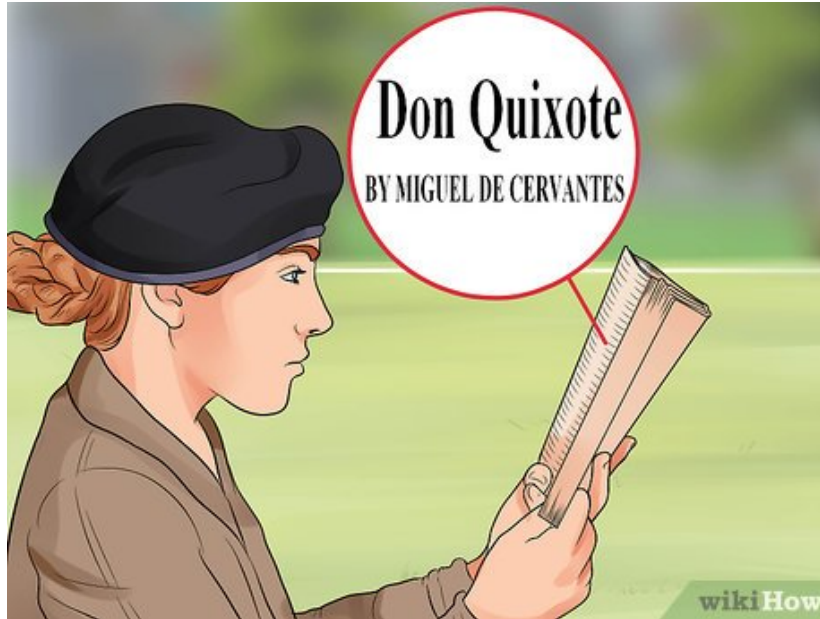
Reading the Classics



Read the classics before 1600. Reading the classics is the very first thing you have to do to be well-read. If you want to build a solid foundation for your understanding of the books you read, then you can't avoid some of the earliest plays, poems, and oral tales ever written down. Remember that the novel didn't really get popular until the 18th century, so you won't find novels on this list. Without reading the poetry of Homer or the plays of Sophocles, you won't be able to call yourself well-read. Here's a list to get you started:

1. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Unknown author) (18th – 17th century BCE)
2. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer (850–750 BCE, 8th century BCE)
3. "The Oresteia" by Aeschylus (458 BCE)
4. *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles (430 BCE)
5. *Medea* by Euripides (431 BCE)
6. *Aeneid* by Virgil (29–19 BCE)
7. *One Thousand and One Nights* (Unknown author) (700–1500)

8. *Beowulf* (Unknown author) (975-1025)
9. *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu (11th century)
10. *The Divine Comedy* by Dante (1265–1321)
11. *The Decameron* by Boccaccio (1349–53)
12. *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer (14th century)
13. "The Mahabharata" by Vyasa

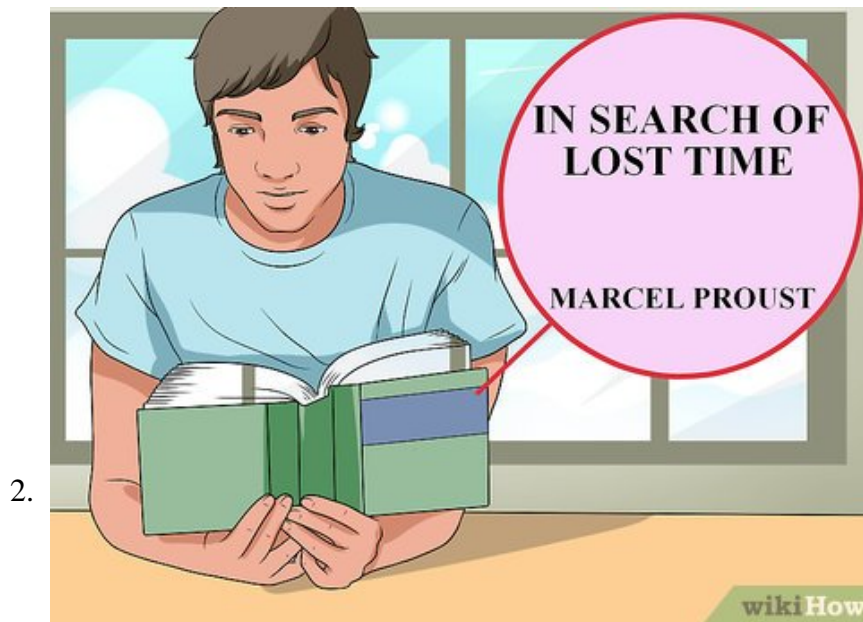


1.

Read the classics from 1600-1913. Though a large amount of material is covered in these measly 300 years, reading the books from the time period when the novel emerged until the beginning of World War I will give you a sense of the progress that the novel and other works had made throughout the Romantic and Victorian periods, as well as an understanding of the realism that was the traditional mode for novels which was then turned on its head with the advent of Modernism and the disillusionment that came from WWI. Here's a list to get you started:

1. *Don Quixote* by Cervantes 1605 (part 1), 1615 (part 2)
2. "Taming of the Shrew," *Romeo and Juliet*, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice," "Much Ado About Nothing," "As You Like It," "Julius Caesar," *Hamlet*, "Othello," "King Lear," and "Macbeth" by William Shakespeare (1593, 1594, 1595, 1596, 1598, 1599, 1599, 1600, 1604, 1605, 1605)
3. *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1726)
4. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (1813)
5. *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1832)
6. *Le Père Goriot* by Honoré de Balzac (1835)
7. *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol (1842)
8. *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847)
9. *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville (1851)
10. *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert (1856)
11. *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (1861)
12. *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy (1869, 1877)
13. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (1899)
14. *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866, 1880)

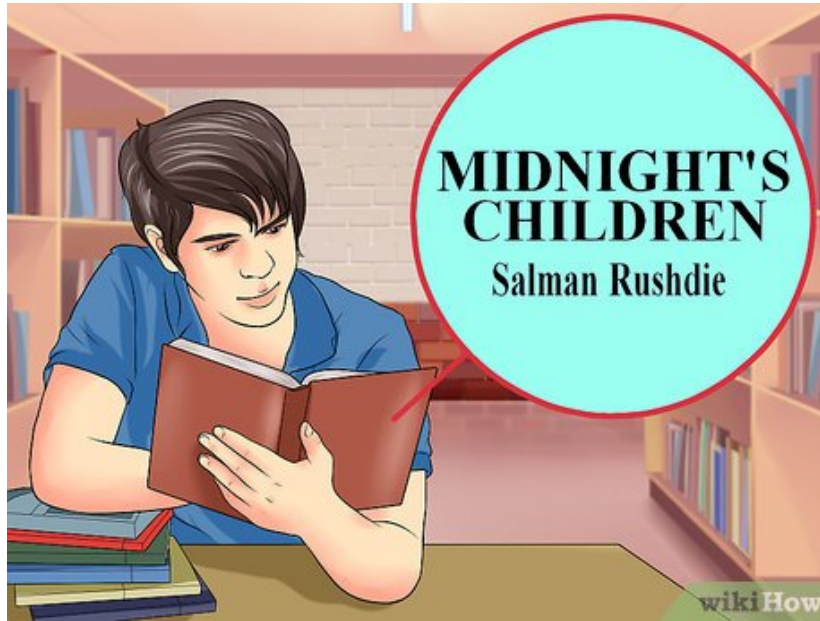
15. *Middlemarch* by George Eliot (1871)



Read the classics from 1914-1995. This time period spans the advent of Modernism, an experimental form of fiction, as well as a rebellion against traditional narratives. Reading the classics of this time period will help you gain an understanding of the dramatic transformation of literature in the 20th century. Here's a list to get you going:

1. *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust (1913–27)
2. *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1922)
3. *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann (1924)
4. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)
5. *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (1925)
6. *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf (1925, 1927)
7. *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner (1929)
8. *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (1942)
9. *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand (1943)
10. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (1949)
11. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (1951)
12. *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (1952)
13. *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway (1926, 1952)
14. "The Lord of The Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien (1954, 1955)
15. *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov (1955)
16. *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo (1955)
17. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958)
18. *Rabbit, Run* by John Updike (1960)
19. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960)
20. *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing (1962)
21. *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath (1963)
22. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (1967)
23. *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (1969)

3.

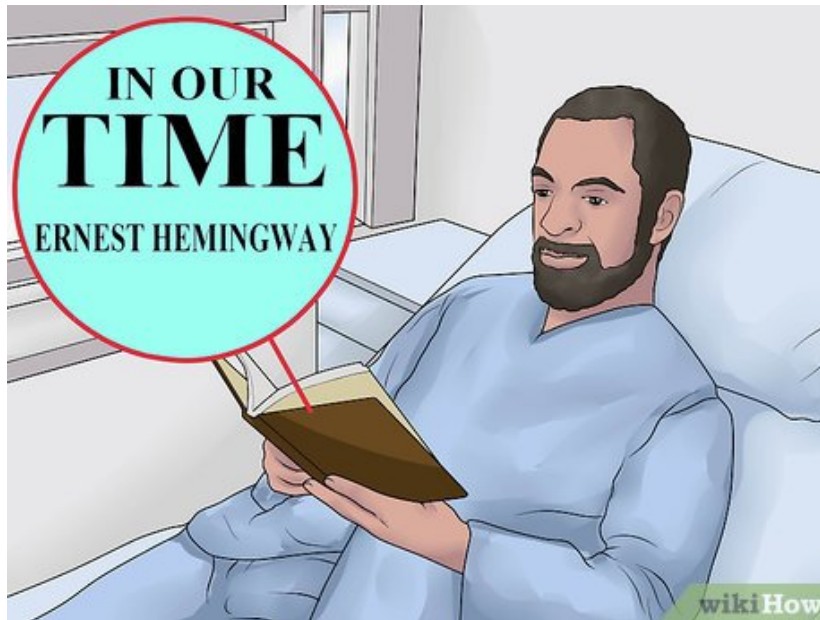


Read more contemporary classics from 1980 to the present. Though these books haven't stood the test of decades of time, there are still a number of contemporary novels that are so popular that it may feel like everyone has read them. In fact, reading these books may make you feel the most well-read because people will be talking about them the most. Here are some books to get you started:

1. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie (1981)
2. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1984)
3. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987)
4. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami (1997)
5. *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth (1997)
6. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997)
7. *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee (1999)
8. *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith (2000)
9. *Atonement* by Ian McEwan (2001)
10. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay* by Michael Chabon (2001)
11. *Everything is Illuminated* by Johnathan Safran Foer (2002)
12. *Middlesex* by Jeffery Eugenides
13. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003)
14. *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones (2003)
15. *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson (2004)
16. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz (2007)
17. *2666* by Roberto Bolaño (2008)
18. *Swamplandia!* by Karen Russell (2011)

Part 2 of 3:

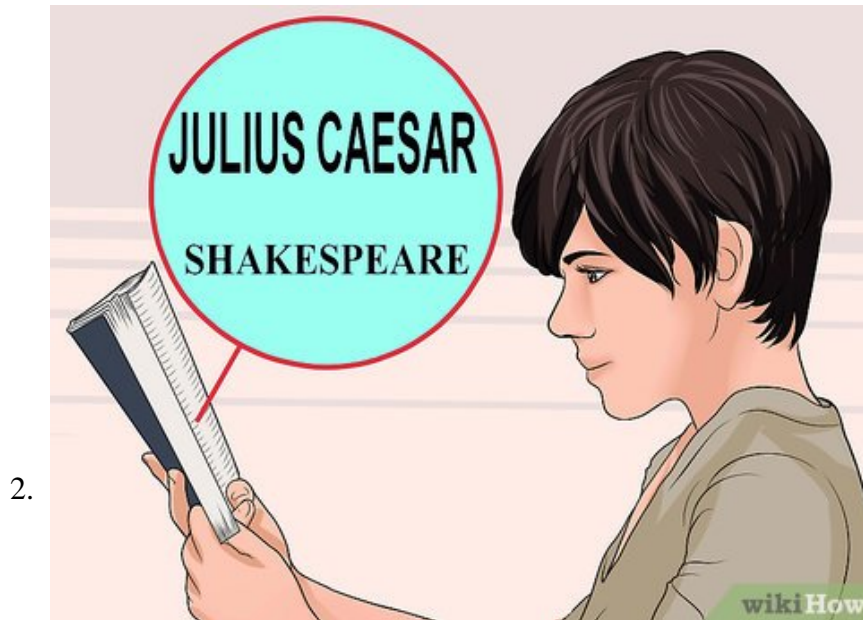
Becoming Well-Read in Different Genres



1.

Read short stories. Short stories are an incredible genre all their own, and if you really want to be well-read, then you have to read the short stories of classic masters as well as some contemporary short stories. For short stories, it's more important to read the works of a particular author than a collection, so here is a list of classic short story writers as well as more contemporary writers that you have to check out:

1. *Classic short story masters (1600-1950)*: Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway, Jorge Luis Borges, Kafka, Isaac Babel, John Updike, Katherine Mansfield, Eudora Welty, and Ray Bradbury.
2. *Contemporary short story masters: (1950-Present)*: Flannery O'Connor, Raymond Carver, Donald Barthelme, Tim 'O'Brien, George Saunders, Jhumpa Lahiri, Junot Diaz, Z.Z. Packer, Joyce Carol Oates, and Denis Johnson.
3. *Classic Short Story Collections*:
 1. *In Our Time* by Ernest Hemingway (1925)
 2. *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor (1953)
 3. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* by Raymond Carver (1981)
 4. *Jesus' Son* by Denis Johnson (1992)
 5. *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri (1999)



Read plays. If you want to be well-read, then you also have to read the works of classic playwrights. Though Shakespeare is the playwright you should know the best, he has been previously listed. However, there are other contemporary and not-so-contemporary plays that you should read if you want to call yourself well-read. Check these out:

1. Everything by Shakespeare, including *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1606, 1597, 1599)
2. *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen (1890, 1879)
3. *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde (1895)
4. *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmund Rostand (1897)
5. *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya* by Chekhov (1904, 1897)
6. *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw (1912)
7. *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder (1938)
8. *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller (1949, 1953)
9. *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (1949)
10. *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose (1954)
11. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams (1947, 1944, 1955)
12. *No Exit* by John-Paul Sartre (1944)
13. *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence (1955)
14. *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O'Neill (1956, 1946)
15. *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)
16. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee (1963)
17. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard (1966)
18. *Betrayal* by Harold Pinter (1978)

3.



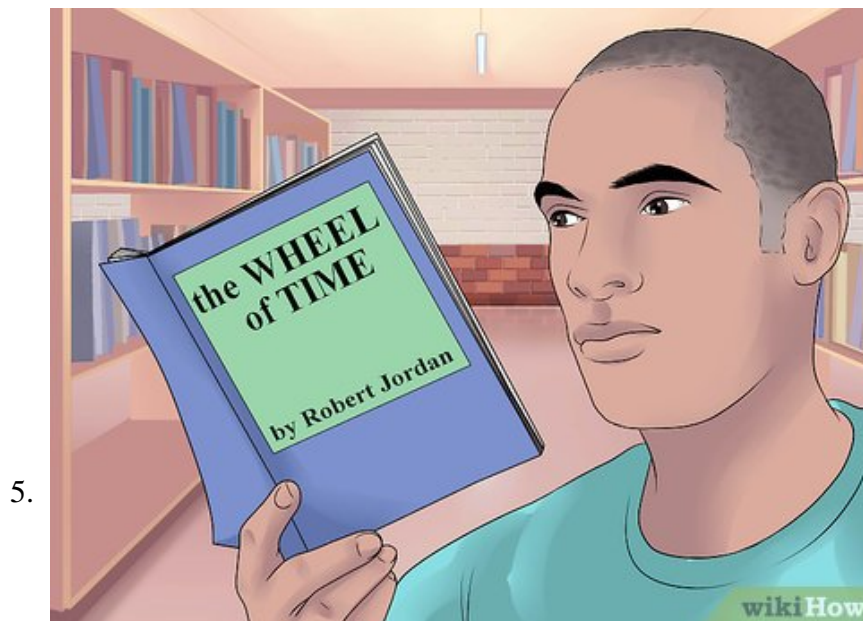
Read poetry. Though the people around you may be less likely to talk about poetry unless you run in well-read circles, it's important to familiarize yourself with both classic and contemporary poets so that you can be part of the conversation. Here are some books to get you started:

1. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* by William Shakespeare (1609)
2. *Paradise Lost* by John Milton (1667)
3. *The Complete Poems* by John Keats (1815)
4. *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman (1855)
5. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes
6. *The Poetry of Robert Frost* by Robert Frost
7. *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* by Emily Dickinson
8. *The Waste Land and Other Poems* by T. S. Eliot (1922)
9. *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* by Pablo Neruda (1924)
10. *E. E. Cummings: Complete Poems, 1904 -1962* by E. E. Cummings
11. *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg (1956)
12. *Ariel* by Sylvia Plath (1965)
13. *The Complete Poems, 1927 - 1979* by Elizabeth Bishop
14. *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966 - 1996* by Seamus Heaney



Read non-fiction. If you really want to be well-read, then you can't just read stuff that people made up. You'll have to read some non-fiction too so that you know what's going on in the world of politics, history, popular science, and whatever the heck else is going on in the world. Here are the different types of non-fiction that you should familiarize yourself with:

1. History
2. Politics
3. Magazines
4. Memoirs
5. Biographies
6. The news



Read popular fiction and non-fiction. If you really want to know what everyone is talking about, then you can't just sit around reading Virgil. You'll have to know what's going on in the modern world too, and

to read those beach reads or plane reads or Oprah's book club has been talking about. How do you know what to read? Well, check out what people are reading on planes, beaches, etc., and also check out the New York Times bestseller list to check out which books are on the list. Here are some popular books that have all been published in the last twenty years that nearly everyone has read these days:

1. "The Wheel of Time" series by Robert Jordan
2. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling
3. Any novel by Nicholas Sparks
4. Any novel by John Grisham
5. The *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins
6. *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown
7. *Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe
8. *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong
9. Books by Bernard Cornwell
10. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" series by George R.R. Martin
11. *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion
12. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* by Dave Eggers
13. *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt
14. *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert
15. *Outliers* and *The Tipping Point* by Malcom Gladwell
16. The *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer
17. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho
18. *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* series by Stieg Larsson

Part 3 of 3:

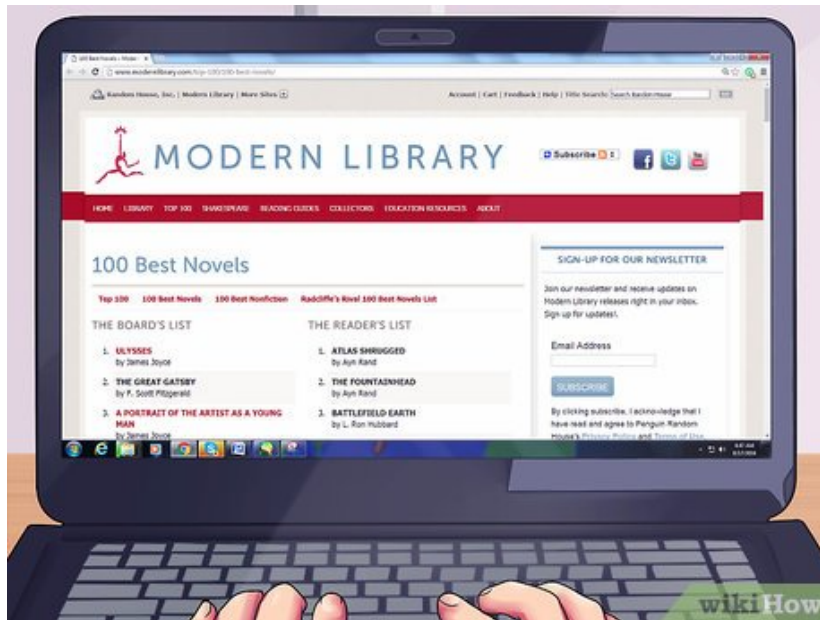
Making Reading More Fun



Set goals. How can setting goals make reading more fun, you may ask? Well, because you'll feel good about yourself if you accomplish something, that's why. Start small: say, you want to read one book a month. Then go down to a book every two weeks. When you're officially addicted to reading, you can read

one book a week -- or even two. Make a list of books and stick to them and you'll be reading more and more in no time at all.

1. Setting goals will also keep you from wasting your time in less productive endeavors. Let's say you've aimed to finish *Ulysses* by the weekend but there's a marathon of *Bad Girls Club* on. Bye bye bad girls, hello culture.



Blaze through top 100 lists. The Modern Library, Amazon, Time Magazine, and the New York Times have some great top 100 lists that can make you feel even more accomplished for reading. You'll feel extremely well-read and good about yourself if you find yourself going down a list and crossing off every book you've read. Check out these lists for more reference:

1. The Modern Library Top 100 Modern Books list.^[1]
2. Time Magazine's Best Book of All Time list.^[2]
3. The Guardian's Top 100 Books of All Time list.^[3]
4. Read books by Nobel-prize winning authors. Check out the list of authors here:^[4]
5. The Village Voice's list of best books of the previous decade, by genre.^[5]

3.



Listen to audio books. Open an account at Audible.com or start listening to books you've rented from your local library. Listening to audiobooks is a great way to be well-read when you're too tired to pick up a book and read. You can also listen to the books in the car, which is perfect for a long commute, or on your iPod while you're taking a walk. Suddenly you'll be looking forward to that long drive to work instead of dreading it!

1. Before you buy or rent the book, see if you can listen to a sample to make sure you like the voice of the person who is reading. If you think the person has an annoying voice, the book will feel like a *slow* read.

4.



Get a Kindle. Though a Kindle can cost over \$100, you'll quickly save money when you start buying books at the discount rate it offers. You can buy many classic novels, such as the works of Henry James, for under one dollar, and you can get contemporary novels at a 10-25% discount from what you would pay in the store, depending on the book. Getting a Kindle will also allow you to download a book the second

you have a reading craving, instead of waiting around for a convenient time to run to the store.

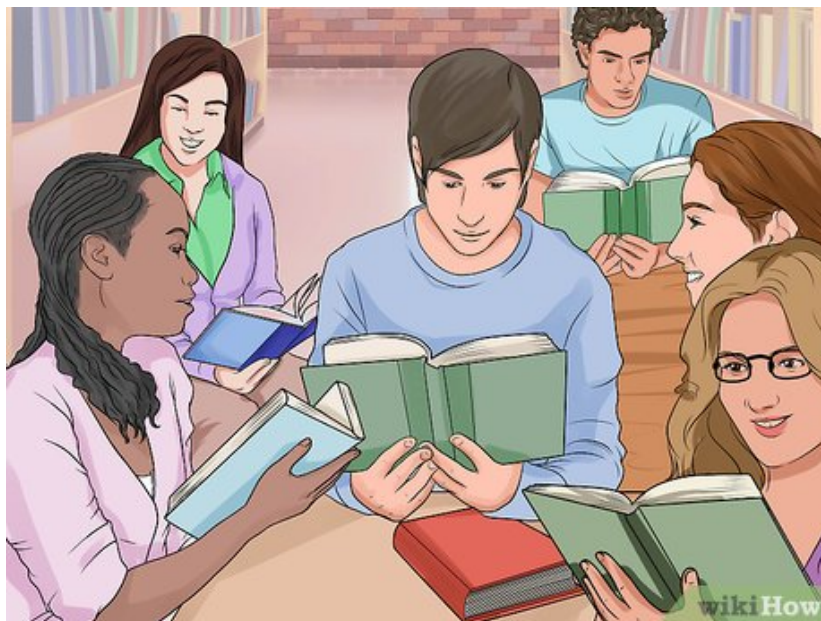
1. When you have a Kindle, you can also sample a chapter of a book before buying it, so you can still browse the books a bit.

5.



Reward yourself with fun books. Though being well-read is important, having fun when you're reading is important too. What's your vice--cheesy detective novels, Harlequin romances, or thrillers? Whatever books you really love to read, don't give 'em up just to read Charles Dickens. Instead, reward yourself: say that for every classic novel or literary novel you read, you'll get to read one thriller, one beach romance, or one book of whatever genre you love the most.

6.



Start or join a book club. Being part of a book club will not only help you make friends with other well-read people, but it will open you up to a wider variety of books and will give you strict deadlines for finishing the books, as well as some time to think about what the books mean to you. Book clubs will keep you from speeding from one book to the next without stopping to think what it all means.

9.



Hang out with other well-read people. Just hanging out with people who love to read, whether they're your co-workers or members of your book club, will open you up to more ideas of what books to read next, and will give you a better sense of which books are popular. There's no point in being well-read if you can't use your knowledge to have interesting discussions with other people.

10.



Listen to podcasts. You can download free podcasts, such as the New Yorker Fiction podcasts, or KCRW's weekly Bookworm podcasts, to hear writers read from their favorite stories or to hear authors discuss their new books. You can also get your news from podcasts, and listen anything from Chekhov's stories to classic speeches in American history, such as the Gettysburg address. Try these podcasts to become more well-read without reading a word:

1. The New Yorker Fiction podcast
2. KCRW's Bookworm
3. PRI's Selected Shorts

4. WBEZ Chicago's This American Life
5. PRI's America Abroad
6. LearnOutLoud's Great Speeches in History Podcast
7. New York Times Book Review podcast

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