

How to Read a Book In a Scholarly Manner

Scholarly books follow certain conventions in organization and format; awareness of and attention to these conventions will help you to understand and evaluate the author's argument. The following steps and questions are designed to facilitate your reading and analysis of books.

Step One: The Cover and Title Page

Read your book carefully beginning with the cover and title page. What can you learn about the book before you open it?

Step Two: The Introductory Matter

Carefully read the preface (if there is one) and the introduction. Sometimes the introduction will, in fact, be labeled as the first chapter. In these two places the author should tell you the following things:

1. Why he or she wrote the book.
2. What questions the author hopes to answer, what issues he or she will address.
3. The author should then tell you how he or she will answer the questions or address the issues to which the book is devoted

Step Three: The Body of the Book

Your reading and analysis of the introductory matter of the book should give you a clear sense of what the author will try to accomplish in the body of the book. You should read the body of the book with the aim of determining how well the author actually achieves these goals.

Step Four: Forming an Opinion

After you have finished the book consider the following questions:

1. Are the author's final conclusions supported by all the material he or she has presented in the chapters?
2. Is the argument, as built and elaborated in the chapters, logically consistent?
3. Evaluate the author's evidence for his or her assertions. What sources does the author use? Are these sources adequate (should the author have used more, or a greater variety, of sources)?

Step Five: Structuring Your Thoughts

Now it is time to think about the book as a whole. Review your notes and make sure you have a clear grasp of the book overall. Return to sections that remain unclear. Then review your assignment. This may be only to discuss the book in class, in which case you should come to class with notes as described above, ready to fully participate in class discussions.

Adapted from: <http://www.mtsu.edu/~jhwillia/howto.html>