

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

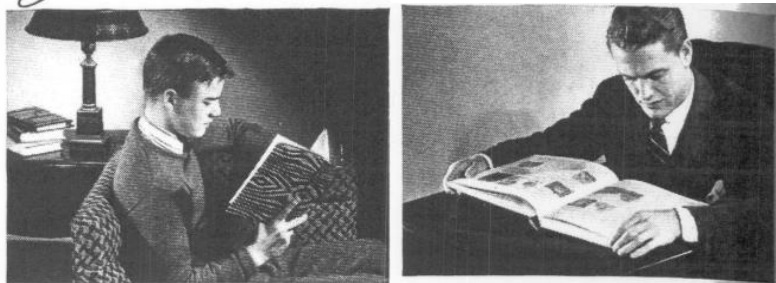
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Before You Read a Book

By Mortimer Adler

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To read anything well, we have to use our minds. But the process of reading does not go on in a vacuum. The external and antecedent conditions may be either favorable or unfavorable. It is hard enough for us to get the most out of what we read, without handicapping our-selves by all sorts of impediments. Obstacles to reading—whatever interferes with extracting the greatest pleasure and profit from books—are almost always due to the reader's own negligence or mental inertia. Only a little care is needed to remove these obstacles and to obtain favorable conditions—of time and place, of light and comfort, of freedom from distractions. As all the well-mannered externals of dining are an aid to digestion, so a well-arranged occasion for reading facilitates the mental exercise a good book requires. But food cannot be digested unless the stomach works. So remember that you cannot read with profit, even in an ideal library, unless you use your mind.



Reading sometimes strains your mind; but it should never strain your eyes. Pick the right chair for the book—unless you're planning to go to sleep.



Conversation is a good thing; but why make an author compete with talkers?



Why tax your memory, when it is so easy to have a pad and pencil handy?



Don't read with one eye on the clock, for there's no timetable for reading



Spend time selecting a book, and save time wasted in irritation and boredom



Don't be a butterfly. Pick one book to read, not half a dozen to toy with



A child at the knee usually puts a book out of hand—always out of mind



If the radio program is worth listening to, why not read some other time?



A dictionary is very handy when you are reading—only if it is kept handy



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