



We all can probably agree that reading is [good for the brain](#). Leaders from [George Washington](#) to [General Patton](#) leaned on books to fill their knowledge gaps, and their efforts paid off on the battlefield. Defense Secretary James Mattis reflected on the impacts of self-study in a [2004 email that went viral](#):

Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flat-footed by any situation, never at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn't give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead.

But, many of us struggle with finding time to read or even get through more than a handful

of books in a calendar year. Six years ago, I averaged about five books a year. Now, I read between 25 and 40 books a year. While this increase can be partially attributed to my deeper commitment to my development as a leader, I believe that the practices I adopted helped as well, and I would like to share some of them with you.

Read Three Books at Once

I used to read only one book at a time, and if I attempted a dense book, it might take me months to finish. Sometimes I struggled to pick it up if it was boring, so by the time I finished, I was burned out from reading. Now I might read one dense book (10 pages at a time), one fiction book, and one popular leadership book. For instance, I might finish three to four books before I finish a 350-page book that is packed with great knowledge, but dry as hell. I found that this helps me keep pushing forward with my reading goals, while not sacrificing the quality of the books of I read.

Develop a Habit

We are all creatures of habit, so the quicker we can develop one, the more likely we are to stick with it. I read every morning and every night. I'm a morning person, so I get up before my family, brew a cup of coffee, and read a few pages before work. I'm also sharper in the morning, so the material I tackle tends to be heavier. I try to get in 10 pages before I leave for the day. At night, I read lighter material and try to get in 20 to 30 minutes of reading before bed. I also read fiction at night, because I find that it helps me to escape the stresses of the day before I go to bed. There is even [research](#) that suggests that 6 minutes of reading before bed reduces stress by 68%. This has been trial-and-error for me over the years, so I recommend finding a good reading schedule that works for you.

Track Your Reading

Most runners track their mileage, and weight lifters track their workouts, so why should

readers be any different? I found that once I started keeping track of the number of books I read, my volume started to increase. [Goodreads](#) is a great way to do this. The site allows you to set reading goals, track your reading, see what your friends have on their bookshelves, and rate your books. I've grabbed several books after seeing a friend read them first. If you aren't keen on letting the Internet know what you are reading, keep a notebook. I started out doing this, and I would even use it to write additional recommendations I came across in other books.

Try Audiobooks

If you have a commute to work or enjoy listening to podcasts while running, audiobooks are a great way to knock out a book and make time go quickly. I recently subscribed to [Audible](#), which gives me a book a month to work through in the car. Also, most military libraries and local public libraries have great audiobook selections if you don't want to pay extra for audiobooks. Finally, if you're worried about retaining what you listened to, keep a notebook in the car. When I listen to books on my commute, I typically write down a couple of insights in my notebook once I arrive at my destination.

Let 2018 Be the Year

The new year is the perfect time to commit to a habit that will improve your life and that is better for you than spending endless hours scrolling through Facebook posts or watching TV. Commit to reading more than you read this year, and I bet you'll finish 2018 with a sense of accomplishment and learn something along the way.

If you are looking for book recommendations, check out my [reading list](#) from this past year or [sign up](#) for my monthly book recommendation email list!

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