



We all can 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. Former 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. Seven 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, I believe that the practices I adopted helped as well, and I would like to share some of them with you.

1. Read Three Books at Once

I used to tackle 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 (and lost 3 months in the process). 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 dry 350-page book packed with great knowledge. I found that this helps me keep pushing forward with my reading goals, while not sacrificing the quality of the books I read.

2. 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 at 5 am, brew a cup of coffee, and read a few pages before working out. I'm also sharper in the morning, so the material I tackle tends to be heavier. I always 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 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%. Whatever your rhythm might be, I recommend

finding a good reading schedule that works for you.

3. 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.

4. 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. Last year I subscribed to [Audible](#), which gives me a book a month to work through in the car. They allow you to return books you don't like. Once or twice, I've returned a book I couldn't get into. 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. And if I really like the book, I will buy a physical copy to keep in my library.

If you are looking for book recommendations, check out my [reading list](#) from this past year or join over 4k other readers who sign up my monthly *Read of the Month* email list. Each month I send out some thoughts on the books I'm reading. It's a great way to learn about new titles. [Click here to sign up.](#)

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