



Loving Literature: How to Escape the Smartphone and Become a Reader

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In a digital, distraction-filled world, fewer and fewer people are reading. Why is this? How can you be the exception?

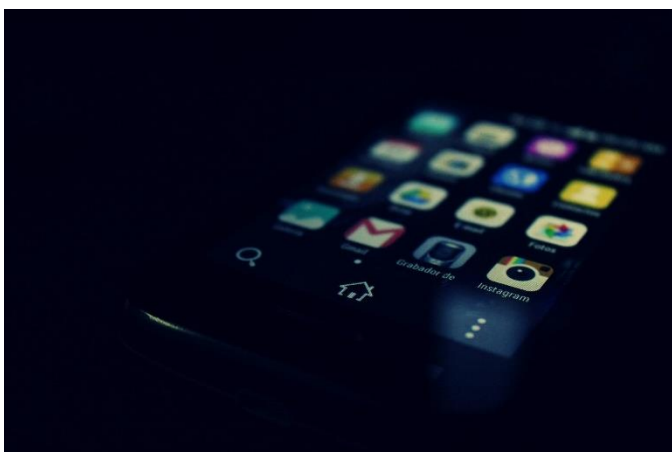
Slaves to the Rectangle

The grocery store, restaurant, and school. The park, the aquarium, the concert, the cubicle, the break room and the parents' house. The cafeteria, the classroom, the daycare, the ski lodge and the beach. Everywhere we go, in every situation, a rectangle the size of our hand dominates. It controls our actions and thoughts. It dictates what we do, or perhaps more importantly, what we don't do. [Political science instructor Jeremy Adams noticed the rectangle's control in his classroom, where he recounts seeing his students becoming](#)

[addicted to their smartphones](#). As their condition and scrolling increased, they began to be less creative, seek less new experiences, and, eventually, read less. The smartphone becomes more and more tantalizing and powerful, and books seem to have lost their sway in American society. [According to the Pew Research Center, 23% of American adults did not read a book in any form in 2021](#). This amounts to roughly eighty million people. This is a shocking statistic. But maybe you're part of it...but the part who wants to change. Maybe you want to stop being a slave to your smartphone.

Straying from Reading

Did you read as a child? I remember hunching under my covers, with a book and flashlight, way past my bedtime. I loved it. I cherished every word I read, every page I turned. You might have been like this too, only to grow up and become part of the eighty million who don't read. If you are, I know you're feeling discouraged. I was there too. An avid reader as a child, I began to slowly become more and more attached to my smartphone. Instead of picking up a book, I scrolled for



hours, feeling empty inside. I turned back to reading and you can too. You can remember the power of literature and words well spoken. Those days aren't over. Despite your screentime, busy schedule, and a society full of distraction, *you* can become a reader.

Why it Matters

If the statistics and experiences above haven't made an impact on you, perhaps you haven't yet come to understand what reading can do. Reading is virtually limitless. [There are many ways that reading benefits an individual including better memory, stress reduction, empathy, and knowledge.](#) In a world filled with division, despondency and lack of understanding, the benefits that reading provides are more important now than ever. Reading allows us to become educated, insightful, and empathetic individuals. Providing entertainment, knowledge, and power, books are integral for a valuable future. Convinced? Good. Let's look at how you can become the reader you were meant to be.

What Is Reading?

Before we can become a reader, we must understand what reading is. Oxford Dictionary defines it as "the action or skill of reading written or printed matter silently or aloud." That's a pretty broad definition. But the reading we're discussing today isn't just reading signs or the news. It's prolonged reading of an *extended* narrative. This can include a variety of forms, which we'll examine later. The smartphone controls our attention span, shortening it. By immersing ourselves in an extended narrative, we take back the power of our attention and focus.

Starting Out

You enter your local library. "This is it! This is the day I get back into reading!" you think. But as you enter the library, your heart sinks. Shelf after shelf stretches out before you, an endless forest of paperbacks and pages. You leave the library empty-handed, overwhelmed by the sheer number of options before you.

We can think of reading as a journey. If you start off on the journey without supplies, maps, and help, you'll get stuck quickly. Preparedness and planning are key factors in becoming a reader.

The truth is, starting your reading journey can be a daunting task. But the hardest part of the journey is getting started. The best way to start out is *slowly*. Don't pick up every book you find in the hopes you'll like it. Don't spend hours scouring the internet trying to find the right material. Don't cancel plans or neglect what you need to do because you're desperate to read. Give yourself grace instead. Recognize that your reading journey is about the process. You have the rest of your life to become the reader you were meant to be. Take a deep breath and start with one book.

Selecting a Book

Let's replay that library scenario. This time, you walk into the forest of shelves with a map for your reading journey. The parchment of your map has marks all over it, certain shelves marked out and others circled. There's the horror section. You weave your way past it, knowing that you hate the feeling of being scared. You skip the kid's section next. After that, you breeze past the cheesy rom-coms, ancient philosophers, and finance sections. Maybe someday you'll come back to these shelves, but not yet. You continue to consult your map until you reach the place you've been looking for. There, above the daunting shelves hangs a small sign reading: Cozy Mysteries. Aha! That's what you've been looking for. You've checked the reviews of several cozy mystery series and found that "The Cat Who..." books are highly favored. You snag one of the shelves. As you check out your book and head for the exit, the forest seems considerably less scary than before.

Begin with a Genre

The sheer number of genres in a library can be overwhelming. You'll see basic genres like mystery, fantasy, philosophy, biography, etc. Within each genre, you'll also find subgenres: high fantasy, cozy mystery, existentialist philosophy, and WWII biography, for

example. It can be overwhelming! But with a few simple steps, you can pair down genres and find the perfect fit.

Chances are, you already know what you like and don't like. For your first book you need to pick something you will enjoy reading. Reading shouldn't feel like a chore. Those finance books might be fantastic. But if you hate anything involving monetary theory, don't pick that as your first book. There are a few steps to finding a genre:



Think of what you already like

Examine movies, art, apps, or videos that you already like. Make a list of media you enjoy. What do you like about them? Write down 3-5 things about each piece. Maybe you love romance movies because they're sentimental, heartfelt, and full of drama. That would open the doors to the genres of romance, historical fiction, fantasy, etc. Find what you already enjoy and try to apply it to reading!

Research



There's no need to make your research extensive. Simply browse through what people are saying about genres, the current hot books on the market, etc. Read plot summaries and reviews to determine if the book is the right fit for you.

The smartphone may be the enemy of reading in some respects, but it can also serve valuable purposes when it comes to reading. The app [Goodreads](#) allows readers to search by genre and rate books. The rating system then leads to personalized recommendations. You can read reviews from other readers, examine subgenres, and read author's profiles. That way, you'll be in the perfect state of mind to select your first book.

Try, try again!

Chances are, not every book you pick up is going to be your favorite. If the first book you try isn't right for you, don't be discouraged! Repeat the first two steps, try some new genres and authors and continue the process. It's all about the journey!

Enjoy the Experience

So, you've selected your first book. What now? As mentioned in choosing your first book, the experience must be enjoyable. To make reading a lasting habit, you have to make it enticing enough to come back to it again and again. Don't make reading a chore. Try to do a little bit at a time. Starting with 30-60 minutes a day is a good idea. This time frame gives you enough time to get immersed and connected to the book each day.



Make your “reading time” something you look forward to! Have a comforting, calm place to read. Make yourself your favorite coffee or snack. Put on classical music if it helps you focus. Then, simply start! Don’t pick up the phone, don’t constantly stop and start. Be intentional, set aside the time, and enjoy it. If it becomes a chore, find something that will help you relax, whether that be book journaling, reading before you sleep, or finding a reading buddy. There are options that can be catered to every personality.

Make it Your Own!

Once you’ve immersed yourself in reading, you’ll find there are many paths to take. Chances are, the more you read, the better at it you’ll be. You’ll begin to branch off into different genres and methods. As you implement reading into your busy life, make it your own!

Options

Although the eventual goal might be to read a hardback book, there are plenty of ways to integrate extended narrative and reading into your life. Audiobooks are a great option while driving and doing projects. Short stories in magazines, online poetry, and E-books provide easy ways to access literature. In places where you would normally pull out your smartphone and begin scrolling, replace it with a book instead. The doctors’ office, long car rides, and early mornings are all great opportunities to read. Be intentional about reading. Don’t take the “easy” path of being on your phone, hoping you’ll get the motivation to read eventually. If you want to eliminate distraction while reading an actual book, put your smartphone in a drawer or give it

to someone you live with to keep until you’re done with reading. Challenge yourself to read when you don’t feel like it. Purposely soak up every word, immersing yourself in the experience.

Your Future Self Will Thank You

You’ve become a reader. Maybe you’re still in the cozy mysteries. Maybe you’ve thrown in some political thrillers. Maybe you’ve found an entirely different genre. Whatever the case, your future self has found the reader within. Instead of scrolling through TikTok as soon as you wake up, you reach for the novel on your nightstand. You’re always ready to share book recommendations with friends. Your first date is a trip to the bookstore. You take the kids to the library. Books, in all their power, have become an integral part of your life. [Sleep, memory, and understanding are coming easier to you.](#) You feel *better*. This can be your reality. So, go to that forest today. Wander through the shelves, finding the perfect book. Then, simply read, finding that inner self that’s been waiting for you.

