

RA Toolbox: How to Read a Book in Five Minutes

A good RA librarian reacts to the reader's desire by being a resource that provides possibilities. We suggest, rather than recommend, possibilities for the reader.

You cannot read all of the new titles added to the collection every year, much less the thousands already on your shelves; but our readers need your assistance. Here are some hints for evaluating authors/titles so you can suggest them to readers.

Choose a book that you would not read for pleasure. Choose a book you would never ever read.

Instructions: Make a pile of new or interesting-looking older titles. Give each one five minutes by the clock and then write on a 3 x 5 index card: Author, Title, Genre, Call#, and a brief note of its contents and use.

FICTION CHECKLIST

- Cover: Indicate contents (e.g. metallic lettering = glitzy; beige colors = serenity)
- Blurb: Does it lure in the reader without revealing the whole plot?
- Heft: Can you balance it in bed?
- Type: Big? Small? Crammed?
- Read first chapter; skip through and read a bit in the middle; read the end.
Does it flow?
- Evaluate:
 - Style
 - Pace
 - Clarity
 - Language: Vulgar? Pretentious? Simple?
- What is format?
 - Narrative?
 - Flashbacks?
 - Alternating Narrator?
 - Letters?
 - First Person?
 - Omniscient Author?
- Connect with other books. Which ones, and why?
- Who for? What for? (Audience)

NONFICTION CHECKLIST

- Cover: Attractive? Reflect content and approach? Color and type appropriate?
- Blurb: Is it helpful?
- Heft: Can you balance it?
- Type: Big? Small? Crammed?
- Table of Contents: Are chapter headings meaningful or whimsical?
- Read a bit of the preface/forward.
- Read part of a chapter (if possible) about something you know. Check for style, reading level, and arrangement of information.
- Illustrations.
- Index and bibliographies.
- Connect with other books. Which ones, and why?
- Who for? What for? (Audience)

(With much appreciation this handout is based on an original document authored by Jane K. Hirsch, Montgomery County, MD Department of Public Libraries, 1986, and disseminated for *Reader's Advisory: The Complete Spectrum*: South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, 9/30/02)

AUDIO CHECKLIST

- Cover: Suggest contents? Narrator prominent? Unabridged/abridged?
- Blurb: Back of case? Description of the book? Profile of the reader?
- Length.
- Listen to first CD or first few tracks of an MP3-CD or Playaway/downloadable. Skip to another CD/Track and listen for story flow. Does the narrator still have energy?
- Extras: Sound effects? Music? Samples of other books? Track changes indicated?
- Evaluate appeal and audibility: Good listen or better read?

(For complete handout see PLA 2014 Conference Sessions & Handouts [3/13/14 2-3:15pm *All About Audiobooks: Improving Readers' Advisory for Listeners*] <http://www.placonference.org/programs/4/4/14> Authors: Jane Hirsch; Lisa Sampley; Mary K. Chelton; Joyce Saricks)

You have to practice this method, or a variation of it, in order for it to work. Each individual must tweak it to suit their learning style and ability to retain information. Do what works for you. But do it.