

Reading Conversations Toolbox:

How to “Read” a Book in Five Minutes

WALE 2016 Conference – Mary Kinser and Jeanne Fondrie, Whatcom County Library System

We want to be a resource that provides readers with possibilities. We suggest, rather than recommend, possibilities for reading/listening/watching.

You can't read every book in the library's collection so it does help if you can become acquainted with as many genres as possible. Getting to know the collection is an important step in helping customers find what they need. Here are a few tips for evaluating titles and authors so you can suggest them to readers.

Select several titles you don't know and examine each one for five minutes.

Fiction Checklist

- Cover: Can you tell a book by its cover? Glitzy and glamorous or somber and serious?
- Blurb: Does it lure you in without revealing the entire plot? Do you have a sense of the plot?
- Heft: Can you read it in bed? How cumbersome is it?
- Type: Is it easy on the eyes? Large or small type? Crammed?
- Chapters: Read the first one; glance through the middle; read the ending. Does the story flow?
- Evaluate for: style, pace, clarity, tone or language (vulgar, pretentious, simple?), format, genre
- Evaluate for format: Who tells this story and how is it told? Narrative? Flashback? Alternating narrators? First person, second person, or omniscient? Is it serious, or for fun and forgetfulness?
- Connect it with other books, think of similar titles; which ones and why?
- Who would like this book? Who is the audience?

Non-Fiction Checklist

- Cover: Does it reflect the contents and approach? Is it attractive? Color and type appropriate?
- Blurb: What does it tell you about the book? Is it helpful?
- Size: Can you hold it? Could you carry it?
- Type: Big or small? Crammed?
- Currency: Is the information up to date; is this the latest edition?
- Table of Contents: Is there one, and how detailed is it? Are chapter headings meaningful?
- Index and bibliographies: Where did the author get their information? Scholarly? How useful?
- Connect it with other books, think of similar titles; which ones and why?
- Who would like this book? Who is the audience?

(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)

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Audio Checklist

- Cover: Does it suggest contents? Is the narrator prominent? Unabridged or 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?

(Based on handout from PLA 2014 Conference Session 3/13/14 2-3:15 pm, All About Audiobooks: Improving Readers’ Advisory for Listeners, Authors: Jane Hirsch; Lisa Sampley; Mary K. Chelton; Joyce Saricks)