

Six best books I read in 2016



We read for the pleasure and benefit of thinking another person's thoughts. Sam Harris

One of my regrets in life is that for a decade (around age 40-50) I punched pause on my learning and grew intellectually disengaged and stale. During those years I don't think I read even one book cover-to-cover.

So, I'm making up for lost time. Now, my goal is to read and process one book a week. (Don't overlook the word *process* in the previous sentence; it's the key to learning from reading.) I wrote a post about the benefits of reading along with some suggestions on how to maximize learning from reading - [Read](#).

Here's a list of the books I read and processed in 2016. At the bottom of this list are my six favorites.

The numbers in brackets represent how I rate each book on a scale from 1 (not good) to 10 (exceptional).

January

1. *Focus* - Daniel Goleman, 2013, 311 pages, [8] - I like everything Goleman writes.
2. *Being Logical* - D.Q. McInerny, 2004, 137 pages, [9] - Written for a lay-person to understand; terrific book on the fundamentals of logic.
3. *Tripwire* - Lee Child, 1999 [6] - Not much to learn from this novel, although I did like this statement, "do it once and do it right."
4. *Code of Conduct* - Brad Thor, 2015 [6] - Good escape novel about modern-day espionage.

February

5. *True North* - Bill George, 2007, 250 pages, [7.5] - Good thoughts on authentic leadership; full of

biographical sketches of good leaders.

6. *Gratitude* - Oliver Sacks, 2015, 45 pages, [5] - I like the life that Oliver Sacks lived and his contribution to society but this book was too simplistic and autobiographical.

7. *How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci* - Michael Gelb, 1998, 322 pages, [6.5] - Develops seven Da Vincian principles such as curiosity, commitment to test knowledge, continued refinement of the senses, etc. He gives practical exercises to develop each principle.

8. *The Power of Myth* - Joseph Campbell, 293 pages, [7] - This book is a transcript of interviews that Bill Moyers did with Campbell, who was the leading expert on this topic.

9. *The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials Into Triumph* - Ryan Holiday, 2014, 200 pages, [6.5] - 32 short chapters on motivational topics; reads like a Tony Robbins event on paper; not many new thoughts but good reminders.

10. *Emotional Intelligence: A Practical Guide* - David Walton, 2012, 163 pages, [6.5] - More readable than Goleman's book on the same subject but a bit scattered.

11. *The Bible Unearthed* - Finkelstein and Silberman, 2002, 385 pages, [6] - These two scholars write a dense and intricate narrative which was difficult for me to follow.

March

12. *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* - Kim and Mauborgne, 2005, 238 pages, [7] - Good book for entrepreneurs to read; just the chapter on Build Execution into Strategy is worth the price of the book.

13. *Enchiridion* - Epictetus, 50 AD, 56 pages, [6] - Wise sayings from the famous Stoic philosopher. Ex. Fortify yourself with contentment, for this is an impregnable fortress.

14. *All the Light We Cannot See* - Anthony Boerr, 2014, 530 pages, [8.5] - The best novel I've read in years. Takes place during WW2.

15. *The Art of Possibility* - Rosamund and Benjamin Zander, 2000, 208 pages, [6] - Too esoteric for my taste. I gleaned a few good thoughts but not many.

16. *Our Man in Damascus: Elie Cohn* - Ele Hen-hanan, 140 pages, [5.5] - A non-fiction book about Elie Cohn, one of Israel's most famous spies.

17. *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens* - Benedict Carey, 2014, 244 pages, [8] - Significant thoughts on how to learn based on scientific research. I highly recommend this book.

18. *The Target* - David Baldacci, 2014, 420 pages [5] - Typical spy-thriller. The only reason I read this book is that I was on a transatlantic flight and it helped pass the time.

April

19. *Smarter, Faster, Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business* - Charles Duhigg, 377 pages, [7] - Fresh thoughts on motivation, teams, focus, goal setting, managing others, decision making, innovation and absorbing data.

20. *Everything Counts* - Gary Blair, 2010, 265 pages [5] - 52 short chapters on various topics. I don't understand the premise of the book: if everything counts, nothing is prioritized.

21. *How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In* - Jim Collins, 2009, 210 pages, [8.5] - Collins is a scholar and a wise teacher of business management. The lessons in this book apply to all organizations.

22. *The Art of Waking People Up* - Cloke and Goldsmith, 300 pages [7] - Good thoughts on coaching, mentoring, feedback, assessment, listening, problem solving confrontation and conflict resolution.

May

23. *13.8: The quest to find the true age of the universe and the theory of everything* - John Gribbin, 2016, 241 pages, [8] - A fascinating update on the latest research by cosmologist and astronomers regarding the age of the universe. It's amazing what these brilliant people know.

24. *Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry* - William Glasser, 1965, 160 pages, [5] - A dated perspective on psychology. I like his emphasis on personal responsibility but other perspective are

Don McMinn

Think with me
questionable.

25. *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life* - Brian Grazer, 2015, 300 pages [7] - Very autobiographical but contains good insights regarding the value of curiosity.

26. *Friday On My Mind* - Nicci French - 2015 435 pages [5] - I needed an escape novel to read on my return flight from Amsterdam. It was okay but forgettable.

27. *Make Me* - Lee Childs, 2015, 400 pgs [6] - I usually like Childs' novels about Jack Reacher but this one was disappointing.

June

28. *Talk Like TED* - Carmine Gallo - 2014, 278 pages [8] - A must-read book for those who speak and write.

29. *Empire of the Summer Moon* - S.C. Gwynn, 319 pages, [6] - A well-researched book about the Comanche Indian tribe. More than I wanted to know about this interesting subject.

30. *The Shawl* - Cynthia Ozick - 1980, 70 pages [4] - This novella won awards, but I didn't understand 25% of what I read.

31. *The Laws of Subtraction: Six Simple Rules for Winning in the Age of Excess Everything* - Matthew May - 2014, 214 pages [7] - Good thoughts on how and why less trumps excess.

July

32. *The Laws of Simplicity* - John Maeda - 2006, 100 pages [3] - A very confusing book. Disjointed, non-linear, rambling. I almost put it in the "books I started but did not finish" category, but it was short enough to skim to the end.

33. *Living in More Than One World* - Bruce Rosenstein - 2009, 150 pages [7] - Based on the life and teachings of Peter Drucker, particularly his emphasis on lifelong learning and maintaining a diverse personal life.

34. *Drucker on Asia* - Drucker & Nakauchi - 1997, 192 pages [6] - I am a huge fan of Drucker, but this book focused exclusively on Japan, which I found to be too limiting.

35. *Brain Rules - 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* - John Medina - 2014, 264 pages [8] - Well researched, well written book on findings in neuroscience that impact our daily lives. Insights on: exercise, sleep, stress, memory, vision, etc.

36. *Everything I Never Told You* - Celeste Ng - 2014, 297 pages [8] - I learned a lot from this novel, about people living false lives due to other people's expectations.

August

37. *Foreign Agent* - Brad Thor - 2016, 335 pages [6] - A semi-interesting spy novel.

38. *The Invention of Nature* - Andrea Wulf - 2015, 341 pages [8] - Alexander von Humboldt was one of the world's greatest explorers, but few people know his story. This book is a biography of his life and a nice description of life in the 1800's.

39. *The Nightingale* - Kristin Hannah - 2015, 438 pages [8] - This novel take place during WW2 and follows the lives of a French family. A terrific book.

40. *Think Like a Freak* - Levitt and Dubner - 2014, 210 pages [7] - The third book in this series. Always interesting information about why and how some things happen.

41. *Greatest Salesman in the World* - Og Mandino - 1968, 103 pages [3] - A trite book; I can't believe it sold so many copies.

September

42. *Fascinate* - Sally Hogshead - 2010, 250 pages [7] - elaborates on seven fascination triggers: lust, mystique, alarm, prestige, power, vice, and trust.

43. *Living the Secular Life* - Phil Zuckerman - 2014, 260 pages [7] - gives a balanced and accurate portrayal of the secular mind and ideology.

44. *State of Wonder* - Ann Patchett - 2011, 353 pages [9] - Everything a novel should be: pure pleasure and hard to put down. Her description of fighting an 18-ft Anaconda in a small boat and a C-section

performed in the jungle of Brazil is worth the read.

45. *Shackleton's Way - Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* - Morrell and Capparell - 2001, 215 pages [7] - Presents a good overview of the expedition and highlights key leadership lessons.

October

46. *Becoming A Learner: Realizing the Opportunity of Education* - Sanders - 2012, 52 pages [7] - A must-read for every student entering college - the purpose of college is to become a learner.

47. *The Gardner and the Carpenter* - Allison Gopnik - 2016, 254 pages [8] - A synopsis on current research regarding raising children. A must-read for parents and grandparents.

48. *What Intelligence Tests Miss - the psychology of rational thought* - Keith Stanovich - 2009 - 212 pages [9] - This book has opened up a new space in my mind - intelligence and rationality are not the same; a person can be both very intelligent and irrational.

49. *Chasing Venus* - Andrea Wulf - 2012, 299 pages [8] - History of the transit of Venus over the sun in 1761 and 1769; these scientists did amazing things.

November

50. *Employee Engagement* - Kevin Kruse - 2012, 81 pages [5] - Self-published book in 14 pt. font and double-spaced. Why do people do this? His thoughts are decent but it's a simple book.

51. *On Managing Yourself* - Harvard Business Review - 2010, 188 pages [8] - Eleven select articles taken from HBR. A very beneficial read for leaders.

52. *Predictably Irrational - The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* - Dan Ariely - 2008, 325 pages [8] - A very engaging and accessible book on why we often behave irrationally.

53. *The End of Faith* - Sam Harris - 2004, 301 pages [7] - Chapter 4 - The Problem with Islam - is a good summary of the challenges that Islam produces.

Books I started but did not finish

Love Does - Bob Goff - A simple, autobiographical book. I'm not that interested in the musings of an average person.

Think and Grow Rich - Napoleon Hill - Very outdated and tedious to read.

The Nature of Rationality - Robert Nozick. I don't have the intellectual hard-drive to process this book. I wish I did. Nozick is a brilliant professor.

Small Is Beautiful - Economics as if People Mattered - E.F. Schumacher - Not a very engaging book. I was also struck by how outdated a book can become in 46 years.

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These books are not listed in order of preference. I chose one book from six different categories so you, the reader, might benefit from choosing a category that you like.

Fiction - *The Nightingale* - Kristin Hannah - This novel take place during WW2 and follows the lives of a French family.

History - *Chasing Venus* - Andrea Wulf - History of the transit of Venus in front of the sun in 1761 and 1769; these scientists did amazing things.

General interest - *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens* - Benedict Carey - Significant thoughts on how to learn based on scientific research.

Self-improvement - *Talk Like TED* - Carmine Gallo - A must-read book for those who speak and write.

Leadership - *On Managing Yourself* - Harvard Business Review - Eleven select articles taken from HBR.

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Science - *What Intelligence Tests Miss - the psychology of rational thought* - Keith Stanovich - This book has opened up a new space in my mind - intelligence and rationality are not the same; a person can be very intelligent and irrational.

Do you need more evidence that reading will enhance your life?

Want to live longer? Read a book. That's the contention of Yale University researchers in a study of 3,635 people published in the September 2016 issue of *Social Science & Medicine*. They concluded that as little as 30 minutes of book reading a day will extend your life, and that, on average, book readers were found to live more than two years longer than non-readers.