

The best 5 books I read last year



The joy and benefit of reading cannot be overestimated. It's the best way to grow intellectually and stay mentally viable. All it takes is time, and it's time well spent.

Consider these avid readers. If they find the time to read, so can we.

- Nike founder Phil Knight so reveres his library that in it you have to take off your shoes and bow.
- Oprah Winfrey credits books with much of her success: "Books were my path to personal freedom."
- Warren Buffett spends five to six hours a day reading five newspapers and 500 pages of corporate reports.
- Bill Gates reads 50 books a year.
- Mark Zuckerberg aimed to read at least one book every two weeks.
- Elon Musk grew up reading two books a day, according to his brother.
- Mark Cuban reads for more than three hours every day.
- Arthur Blank, a cofounder of Home Depot, reads two hours a day.
- Billionaire entrepreneur David Rubenstein reads six books a week.
- Dan Gilbert, the self-made billionaire who owns the Cleveland Cavaliers, reads for one to two hours a day. [Data from Michael Simmons, *The 5-hour Rule*, Business Insider, December 11, 2019]

If you're not in the habit of reading books, start by reading just one good book a month.

My goal is to read a book a week. Here's what I read in 2019. At the end of the list I give my top five books of the year.

January

1. *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* - Stephen Hawking - 2018, 218 pages [8] — An interesting book by an incredible man. Gives a brief update on what science says about the big issues.
2. *Past Tense* - Lee Child - 2018, 382 pages [7] - I allow myself 3-4 trivial novels per year. Pure entertainment; nothing much to learn, but a good read.
3. *The Greatest Show on Earth* - Richard Dawkins, 2009, 437 pages [7.5] - Dawkins is the definitive voice on evolution. Regardless of your conviction regarding this topic, this is a fascinating read.
4. *Interior States* - Meghan O’Gieblyn - 2018, 221 pages [6.5] - Collection of essays on various topics. The title is a double entendre referring to O’Gieblyn’s personal mental and emotional states and the fact that she was raised in the mid-West.
5. *Factfulness* - Hans Rosling - 2018, 297 pages [9] - Very readable; almost entertaining. Rosling lists ten reasons why humans often misunderstand facts.

February

6. *Launch* - Jeff Walker - 2014, 180 pages [6] - Rather cheesy book on online marketing strategy.
7. *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* - Stephen LaBerge - 1990, 255 pages [7] - Lucid dreaming is when you’re having a dream and you realize it’s a dream. This is a good, scientific approach to this topic.
8. *Give and Take - Why helping others drives our success* - Adam Grant - 2013, 240 pages [7] - Good thoughts on the value of being generous. I tried to read this book digitally and didn’t enjoy the experience. I’m going back to physical books.
9. *The Sherlockian* - Graham Moore, 2010, 350 pages [8] - If you like reading Sherlock Holmes, you’ll enjoy this book. Moore maintains two stories—one takes place in 1900, the other in 2010.
10. *Math Squared - 100 Concepts You Should Know* - Freiberger and Thomas, 248 pages [7.5] - A helpful summary of 100 major math principles.
11. *The Bridge of Reason - Ten Steps to See God* - Joshua Rasmussen, 2018, 102 pages [6.5] - Written for philosophers, I wasn’t able to follow the conversation.
12. *More or Less - Choosing a Lifestyle of Excessive Generosity* - Jeff Shinabarger, 2013, 260 pages [6.5] - Not many new thoughts in this book.
13. *Nothing to Envy - Ordinary Lives in North Korea* - Barbara Demick - 2015, 303 pages [9] - An interesting history of the enigma that is North Korea.

March

14. *Inside of a Dog - What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* - Alexandra Horowitz, 2009, 301 pages [8] - A must read for everyone who owns a dog. A scientific but readable treatise on canines.
15. *Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* - Mark Lilla, 2007, 219 pages [7] - An interesting discussion of religion and politics.
16. *Forged in Crisis - The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times* - Nancy Koehn, 2017, 448 pages [9] - Biography of Shackleton, Lincoln, Douglass, Bonhoeffer and Carson. Well written and informative.

April

17. *Zen in the Art of Archery* - Eugen Herrigel, 1953, 81 pages [5] - Japanese archery is an art-form that takes decades to master. I found the Zen aspect of this book interesting but hard to grasp, perhaps because I’m a Westerner.
18. *Your Brain - 100 things you never knew* - National Geographic, 2019, 125 pages [8] - Terrific,

succinct information about the center of everyone's universe.

19. *Dead on Arrival* - Matt Richtel, 2017, 442 pages (paperback) [5] - Typical modern thriller, just not worth the time it took to read it.
20. *The Illusion of Knowledge* - Stoman and Fernbach, 2017, 265 pages [9] - Written by scientists but in layman's language. Terrific thoughts about the fact that collaborative intelligence is always better than individual intelligence.
21. *Time in History* - G.J. Whitrow - 1988, 186 pages [6.5] - Densely written, I could not help but skim some of the pages, but interesting nevertheless. It is the history of the concept of time.

May

22. *Good Beyond Evil - Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, Eva Gossman, 2002, 134 pages [8.5] - Gossman survived the Holocaust because of the kindness of six people; she tells the story in an engaging way.
23. *The Search for God and Guinness—A Biography of the Beer That Changed the World*, Stephen Mansfield, 2009, 270 pages [8.5] - A terrific book on a fascinating subject. I was interested to read that Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards were all beer aficionados.

June

24. *The Storm on Our Shores; One Island, Two Soldiers, and the Forgotten Battle of WW2* - Mark Obmascik, 2019, 231 pages [8.5] - Not since the battle of 1812 had America ceded land to an enemy, but in WW2 the small Alaskan island of Attu was captured by the Japanese. This book tells the story of that battle from the perspective of a Japanese surgeon and an American soldier.
25. *The Fire Next Time* - James Baldwin, 1962, 106 pages [6.5] - Written at the height of the Civil rights movement, it offers keen insight into the challenges of race inequalities.
26. *The Defining Decade - Why your twenties matter and how to make the most of them now* - Meg Jay, 2012, 201 pages [9] - Everyone ages 15-30 should read this book, but so should people ages 30-70. Truly, there's something for everyone in this book.
27. *Option B* - Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, 2017, 176 pages [9] - Deals with developing resiliency and life after tragedy.
28. *Meditations* - Marcus Aurelius (born 121 A.D.), translation by Gregory Hays, 170 pages [7] - A collection of his wise sayings. It's hard to digest all of this information. Like reading the book of Proverbs in one setting.

July

29. *Moonwalking With Einstein - The Art and Science of Remembering Everything* - Joshua Foer, 271 pages, 2011 [9] - As a journalist, Joshua Foer covered the USA Memory Championships, then decided that he would enter the next year's contest, and he won.
30. *Letters To A Young Contrarian* - Christopher Hitchens, 141 pages, 2001 [7] - Hitchens writes to the next generation of the importance of freethinking and disagreement.
31. *I Am Pilgrim* - Terry Hayes, 641 pages, 2014 [8] - A spy-thriller with multiple plots.
32. *Powerful* - Patti McCord, 150 pages, 2017 [8] - McCord was director of HR for Netflix. She posits some radical but good thoughts for organizations.

August

33. *Leading Lives That Matter - What We Should Do and Who We Should Be* - compiled by Schwehn and Bass, 539 pages, 2008 [7] - Anthology on work and vocation with contributions from Schweitzer, T. Roosevelt, Homer, and many others.

34. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* - Leo Tolstoy - translated by Maude, 1895 [8] - A discourse on mortality, death, and meaning in life.
35. *The Power of Habits—Start good ones, break bad ones, change your life* - Special Time Edition - 94 pages, 2019 [6] - A series of 16 short, easy to read articles.

September

36. *The Darwin Conspiracy* - John Darnton, 303 pages, 2015 [7] - Fascinating fiction that toggles between Darwin's journey on the Beagle and a modern-day historian.
37. *Why Everything You Know About Soccer Is Wrong - The Numbers Game* - Chris Anderson and David Sally, 349 pages, 2013 [7] - I thought the book would be more about numbers than soccer, but I was wrong. Since I'm not a big sports fan, I didn't enjoy this book as much as a soccer fan would.
38. *The Cure for Stupidity - Using Brain Science to Explain Irrational Behavior at Work* - Eric Bailey, 185 pages, 2019 [5] - Disjointed thoughts and hard to follow.

October

39. *The Fifth Risk* - Michael Lewis, 209 pages, 2018 [7] - The Fifth Risk is the mismanagement of government programs. This book will inform you and scare you.
40. *The Undoing Project* - Michael Lewis, 352 pages, 2017 [9.5] - The story of the collaboration between two of the top psychologists of our generation: Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman.

November

41. *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson, 340 pages, 1978 [7] - Though written 41 years ago, the book still accurately addresses the stages of a man's life. But not much is said about later years.

December

42. *The Joy of Efficiency - How to live and work better with less*, Paul Westbrook, 188 pages, 2019 [7] - My favorite chapters were on how to build an energy efficient house.
43. *Neanderthal*, John Darnton, 368 pages, 1996 [6.5] - Fictional story of discovering a secluded tribe of Homo sapiens neanderthalensis.
44. *Mind In Motion*, Barbara Tversky, 288 pages, 2019 [7] - Brilliant thoughts; a bit scattered.
45. *Into the Raging Sea*, Rachel Slade, 373 pages, 2018 [8.5] - A fascinating account of the most significant U.S. maritime ship wreck since W.W. 2 - the sinking of the container ship, El Faro, on its last trip to Puerto Rico.

Five best books I read in 2019

Psychology - *The Undoing Project* - Michael Lewis, 352 pages, 2017 [9.5] - The story of the collaboration between two of the top psychologists of our generation: Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman.

Self-help - *Moonwalking With Einstein - The Art and Science of Remembering Everything* - Joshua Foer, 271 pages, 2011 [9] - As a journalist, Joshua Foer covered the USA Memory Championships, then decided that he would enter the next year's contest, and he won.

History - *Forged in Crisis - The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times* - Nancy Koehn, 2017, 448 pages [9] - Biography of Shackleton, Lincoln, Douglass, Bonhoeffer and Carson. Well written, informative, and inspiring.

Don McMinn

Think with me

Fiction - *The Sherlockian* - Graham Moore, 2010, 350 pages [8] - If you like reading Sherlock Holmes, you'll enjoy this book. Moore toggles back and forth between two stories—one takes place in 1900, the other in 2010.

Current events - *Nothing to Envy - Ordinary Lives in North Korea* - Barbara Demick - 2015, 303 pages [9]
- An interesting history of the enigma that is North Korea.