

The Four Levels of Reading

Based on: *How to Read a Book*
by, Mortimer J. Adler and
Charles Van Doren

Level #1



Elementary Reading



It's also called initial reading, rudimentary reading, or basic reading. Once this level is mastered, readers go from 'nonliterary to at least beginning literacy. In mastering this level, one learns the rudiments of the art of reading, receives basic training in reading, and acquires initial reading skills (P. 16). The question that is asked at this level is :what does the sentence say?

Level #2



Inspectional reading



Also called pre-reading or skimming. This level is 'characterized by its emphasis on time...its aim is to get the most out of a book within a given time'. This is usually done through an examination of the surface of the book checking things such as: the title of the book, its preface, table of contents, index, publisher's blurb if available...etc. Questions asked at this level are: What kind of book is it (a novel, a history, a scientific treatise)? What is the book about? What is the structure of the book?(P.18-19).

Level #3



Analytical Reading



This is a more demanding level for readers. It's more complex than the preceding levels and represents a thorough and complete form of reading. Analytic reading is 'hardly ever necessary if your goal in reading is simply information or entertainment.(It is) preeminently for the sake of understanding". (P.19)

Level #4



Syntopical Reading



It's also called comparative reading. This is the most complex and systematic level of reading. A Syntopical reader reads different texts on the same subject and compares them to each other to arrive at a holistic and more nuanced understanding of the subject.

Source:

How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading (Revised Edition),
by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren