

How to find a good book

Do:

Read everything by an author you already love

Think about your favourite books or series and do some research to find out if there are any other books by the same author. You may be pleasantly surprised to find a treasure trove of stories to keep you entertained for many many hours. The only two caveats with this one is that **A)** if they have A LOT of books to their name, there are bound to be duds among them (particularly if they're traditionally published because sometimes authors rush out books to keep to their publisher's deadlines); and **B)** just because you enjoyed J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (a children's book about magic and good and evil), does not mean you'll enjoy her The Casual Vacancy (an adult novel about an English town parish council). Try to stick to the genre you most enjoy by that author.

Read reliable reviews

Find other readers who have reviewed books you've read and see if your interests and opinions line up. If they do, stay up to date with their reading list and if they leave a positive review of another book, you've got a good chance of feeling the same way about that story. [Goodreads](#) is a good place to go to find likeminded readers.

Read the first few pages

If you're not sure about investing in a book, an easy test is to read a few pages (excluding any prologues). If the story grabs you and you don't want to stop reading, it's definitely a good sign. If you're finding it a drag from the outset, you can probably assume that the story won't get better. Trust your gut and put the book back if it doesn't pass the first few pages test.

How to find a good book

Do:

Consume adaptations of a story first

If you don't mind being behind the eight ball in literature trends, try and see if the story has been adapted to film, TV, theatre, or other forms of entertainment (e.g. *The Witcher* by Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski was first adapted as a video game and then as a Netflix TV series). This is a great way of vetting stories if you're not sure they are all they're cracked up to be.

Ask authors what they're reading

Authors need to stay publicly friendly with one another and appear supportive of their peers, so they're going to share about what other authors are doing whether they like their work or not (don't get me wrong, some of it they do like, it's just hard to tell the real support apart from the public face they put on). To get around this, on social media, follow authors you love and find out what books they are actually reading in their personal time: reading for the love of reading. You can find out by private messaging them. Don't go by what they're plugging on their page.



How to find a good book

Don't:

Read best sellers just because they're best sellers

Books can get big initial sales and make best sellers lists merely on an author's name, or through a massive advertising campaign. Don't get swept up in the hype. Likewise, don't read something just because it got an award. The criteria a panel uses to judge literary awards is unlikely to be the same criteria you use to judge a good book from a bad one. I once read a book by an author who won a Nobel Prize for Literature but also didn't believe in full stops. The key is to approach any golden sticker on the front cover of a book with a healthy dose of scepticism.

Judge the cover

The most beautiful book cover I ever saw turned out to be predictable and cliché and a big fat disappointment.

Some of the best fantasy books have bad covers and some of the worst fantasy books have good covers.

With self-published and indie published authors, they often struggle to get a good cover artist, and with traditionally published authors, they typically have little control over what their publishing company cover artist does with the design. Which means that neither author actually ends up with a cover they're really happy with (even if they say otherwise on their socials – they have to put on a happy face about it).

So when looking at a book cover, reserve your judgment and use some of the methods above to determine whether it's worthy of your time.

How to find a good book

Don't:

Take recommendations from people who have different taste to you

You've read something recommended by a friend and it wasn't your cup of tea... don't be fooled again! Just because they're a good person doesn't mean that your taste in literature is compatible. Take all book recommendations by them in future with a pinch of salt.

Take stock in jacket quotes and attributions

Publishers and editors often solicit favourable quotes from popular authors of work broadly similar to the book at hand and these quotes tend to be printed on the jacket of hardcovers. The authors are generally happy to provide favourable quotes, having benefitted from this practice themselves. This doesn't mean that they lie but it's certainly hard to summarise a novel in a few carefully chosen words.

Remember, these are advertisements, not reviews. They haven't included the bad stuff.

