

2015

Reflections on Reading

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Recommended Citation

Jackson, John E. (2015) "Reflections on Reading," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 68 : No. 2 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol68/iss2/20>

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson of the Naval War College is the program manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

One of the primary missions of the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) is to encourage sailors of all ranks to *read* for professional development, for self-improvement, and for entertainment and relaxation. A very interesting website, *WhytoReadBooks* (WhytoRead.com), provides a wealth of knowledge about interesting and informative books, and a recent post on that site provided the following list (slightly edited and used by permission) of reasons why you should read more books:

Ten Reasons Why You Should Read More Books:

- 1. *To Develop Your Verbal Abilities.*** Although it doesn't always make you a better communicator, those who read tend to have a more varied range of words to express how they feel and to get their point across. This increases exponentially with the more volumes you consume, giving you a higher level of vocabulary to use in everyday life.
- 2. *Improves Your Focus and Concentration.*** Unlike blog posts and news articles, sitting down with a book takes long periods of focus and concentration, which at first is hard to do. Being fully engaged in a book involves closing off the outside world and immersing yourself into the text, which over time will strengthen your attention span.
- 3. *Readers Enjoy the Arts and Improve the World.*** A study done by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) explains that people who read for pleasure are many times more likely to visit museums and attend concerts than those who do not, and almost three times more likely to perform volunteer and charity work. Readers are active participants in the world around them, and that engagement is critical to individual and social well-being.
- 4. *It Improves Your Imagination.*** You are only limited by what you can imagine, and the worlds described in books, as well as other people's views and opinions,

will help you expand your understanding of what is possible. By reading a written description of an event or a place, your mind is responsible for creating that image in your head, instead of having the image placed in front of you when you watch television.

5. *Reading Makes You Smarter.* Books offer an outstanding wealth of learning and at a much cheaper price than taking a course. Reading gives you a chance to consume a huge amount of research in a relatively short amount of time. Anne E. Cunningham and Keith E. Stanovich's book *What Reading Does for the Mind* also notes that heavy readers tend to display greater knowledge of how things work and who or what people were. Additionally, books at home have been strongly linked to improved academic achievement.

6. *It Makes You Interesting and Attractive.* This goes hand in hand with reading to become smarter. Having a library of information that you have picked up from nonfiction reading will come in handy in any academic or scholarly conversation. You will be able to hold your own and add to the conversation instead of having to make your excuses and leave. You will be able to engage a wider variety of people in conversation and in turn improve your knowledge and conversation skills.

7. *It Reduces Stress.* A study by consultancy firm Mindlab International at the University of Sussex showed that reading reduces stress. Subjects only needed to read, silently, for six minutes to slow down the heart rate and ease tension in the muscles. In fact, it resulted in lower stress levels than before they started reading.

8. *It Improves Your Memory.* In her book *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Maryanne Wolf explains that "typically, when you read, you have more time to think. Reading gives you a unique pause button for comprehension and insight. By and large, with oral language—when you watch a film or listen to a tape—you don't press pause." The benefits of this increased activity keeps your memory sharp and your learning capacity nimble.

9. *To Discover and Create Yourself.* In his book *How to Read and Why*, Harold Bloom says that we should read slowly, with love, openness, and with our inner ear cocked. He explains we should read to increase our wit and imagination, our sense of intimacy—in short, our entire consciousness—and also to heal our pain. "Until you become yourself, what benefit can you be to others?" With the endless amount of perspectives and lives we can read about, books can give us an opportunity to have experiences that we haven't had the opportunity to, and still allow us to learn the life skills they entail. Books are a fast track to creating yourself.

10. *For Entertainment.* All the benefits of reading mentioned so far are a bonus result of the most important benefit of reading: its entertainment value. If it were not for the entertainment value, reading would be a chore but it needn't be.

Reading is not only fun, but it has all the added benefits that we have discussed so far. Much more enthralling than watching a movie or a TV show (although they have their many benefits as well), a good book can keep us amused while developing our life skills.

We hope you will find one or more compelling reasons from the list above to pick up a book (from the CNO-PRP, or elsewhere) and enrich your life. And check out WhytoRead.com to find book lists from a number of genres to inspire you to read more.

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