How to Read a Book:
Rules for Analytical Reading

From Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Books, 1972), pp 163-64.

I.   Analysis: Rules for Finding What a Book is About

1. Classify the book according to kind and subject matter.

2. State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity.

3. Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and analyze these parts as you have analyzed the whole.

4. Define the problem or problems the author is trying to solve.

II.   Interpretation: Rules for Interpreting a Book's Content

5. Come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words.

6. Grasp the author's leading propositions by dealing with his most important sentences.

7. Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.

8. Determine which of his problems the author has solved, and which he has not; and of the latter, decide which the author knew he had failed to solve.

III.   Criticism: Rules for Criticizing a Book as a Communication of Knowledge

A. General Maxims of Intellectual Etiquette

9. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your interpretation of the book. (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say "I understand.")

10. Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.

11. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.

B. Special Criteria for Points of Criticism

12. Show wherein the author is uninformed.

13. Show wherein the author is misinformed.

14. Show wherein the author is illogical.

15. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

Note: Of these last four, the first three are criteria for disagreement. Failing in all of these, you must agree at least in part, although you may suspend judgment on the whole, in light of the last point.