

## What to do before buying a novel.

OK, you do not get much time to read novels anymore. You used to but that was another life. Before you could pick up something that appealed and because you read so much, you were not too disappointed if it did not grab you like you thought it would. Things have changed. Now when you pick up a novel to read it has to get you in quickly or it will collect dust on your bedside table. There are too many other things demanding your attention, like sleep! And when you go to the bookshop sometimes, it is hard not to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of books on offer, especially with the big mega stores becoming the norm. So what to do? I have put together a checklist that with a little bit of preparation can help you wade through the sea of books and help you pick a surefire winner: a novel that will captivate YOU.

1. The best place to start is to look out in magazines, newspapers and online for book reviews see what is being billed as the latest must read. Even if you do not have time to read the whole review, jot down the title and author as one to look out for.

2. Ask friends for the best book they have read in the last few months or this year or the last few years if like you they really are struggling with the whole when-am-I-going-to-find-time-to-read-a-novel?-thing. Do not just ask them what book was their favourite; ask them why they liked it. Was it an unusual story, was the pace so fast they needed a crash helmet, did it have edge of the seat suspense, and did it remind them of growing up? You want to know what exactly made it a great read for them. This will help you to refine your search, especially if they say they liked the quirky twist in the ending and you do not do quirky. Just because you are close friends does not automatically mean you like the same books.
3. Ask the people behind the counter at your favorite bookshop what they enjoyed reading and get them to take you to it or give you a specific reference number so you can find it easily yourself.
4. When you get the book in your hands look at the cover. Is it a catchy title? Does the cover appeal to you? Despite the old saying about not judging book covers, publishers put a lot of time and effort into creating a captivating cover and title. Does it work for you?
5. Turn it over and read the back. Does it still appeal? Do you only like reading modern books and this is set in the 1800s? It is important to be ruthless at this stage. If the premise for the story does not leave you wanting more, chances are the writing probably will not either.
6. Look at the size of the book. I know this isn't something for the purists but if you don't get time to read many novels, don't launch back in with a 700 page tome or it will probably take you all year and then you'll be frustrated and annoyed at wasting time and money on something you haven't enjoyed.
7. The next step is crucial. Read the opening - does it get you in straight off? Novels have a bit more time to seduce you than a short story but not much these days. A good opening is like someone placing a thread around your finger and gently tugging on it. They have got you but can they keep you?
8. Has the author mentioned 10 characters and 5 different place names in the first 3 paragraphs? You want to be captivated not confused, remember? If your main reading time is before you drop off to sleep, books that have lots of characters and places or even a family tree at the beginning are a warning that it gets complicated and you need to keep track of who is who and what they're up to.
9. Are there lots of long sentences or are they short and sharp? Lots of short sentences usually mean action and pace. Something. Is happening. Right now. Usually it is best to go for a story with a combination of both - one that suits your preferred action/background information mix.
10. If you still think the book in your hands is worthy, randomly flip open the book in 5 places and see whether it is densely packed with text. Is there dialogue at each page you stop? No dialogue usually means that a book is more descriptive rather than direct scenes. If you want a compelling read then go for something with a fair amount of dialogue; if you don't mind a slower pace then bits of dialogue here and there is probably enough to keep you going. If it all stacks up, buy it and enjoy. Just one more tip though. If it does not captivate you in the first 100 pages and you find reading it a chore, give it up. Do not keep persisting just because you do not like leaving things unfinished. The book will not feel hurt if you do not finish it. And the author will never know.

## About the Author

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