



Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them (P.S.)

By Francine Prose

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Long before there were creative-writing workshops and degrees, how did aspiring writers learn to write? By reading the work of their predecessors and contemporaries, says Francine Prose.

In *Reading Like a Writer*, Prose invites you to sit by her side and take a guided tour of the tools and the tricks of the masters. She reads the work of the very best writers—Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Kafka, Austen, Dickens, Woolf, Chekhov—and discovers why their work has endured. She takes pleasure in the long and magnificent sentences of Philip Roth and the breathtaking paragraphs of Isaac Babel; she is deeply moved by the brilliant characterization in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. She looks to John Le Carré for a lesson in how to advance plot through dialogue, to Flannery O'Connor for the cunning use of the telling detail, and to James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield for clever examples of how to employ gesture to create character. She cautions readers to slow down and pay attention to words, the raw material out of which literature is crafted.

Written with passion, humor, and wisdom, *Reading Like a Writer* will inspire readers to return to literature with a fresh eye and an eager heart.

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- Sales Rank: #19259 in Books
- Brand: Prose, Francine
- Published on: 2007-04-10
- Released on: 2007-04-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .72" w x 5.31" l, .50 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 273 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The trick to writing, Prose writes, is reading—carefully, deliberately and slowly. While this might seem like a no-brainer, Prose (*Blue Angel; A Changed Man*) masterfully meditates on how quality reading informs great writing, which will warm the cold, jaded hearts of even the most frustrated, unappreciated and unpublished writers. Chapters treat the nuts and bolts of writing (words, sentences, paragraphs) as well as issues of craft (narration, character, dialogue), all of which Prose discusses using story or novel excerpts. This is where the book truly shines; Prose is remarkably egalitarian in choosing exemplars of fiction: David Gates, Denis Johnson, John le Carré and ZZ Packer, for instance, are considered as seriously as Chekhov, Melville, Flaubert or Babel. Prose insists that "literature not only breaks the rules, but makes us realize that there *are none*," and urges writers to re-read the classics (Chekhov, especially) and view "reading as something that might move or delight you." Prose's guide to reading and writing belongs on every writer's bookshelf alongside E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*. (Aug.)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Life is precious, and much of that preciousness lies in the details: the sights, the sounds, the scents we too often ignore in our busy lives. Prose makes a superb application of that concept for readers of fiction. To know how the great writers create their magic, one needs to engage in a close reading of the masters, for that is precisely what successful writers have done for thousands of years. College programs in creative writing and summer workshops serve a purpose, but they can never replace a careful reading of the likes of Austen, Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Kafka, Salinger, Tolstoy, and Woolf. In this excellent guide, Prose explains exactly what she means by close reading, drawing attention to the brick and mortar of outstanding narratives: words, sentences, paragraphs, character, dialogue, details, and more. In the process, she does no less than escort readers to a heightened level of appreciation of great literature. Many will want to go to the shelves to read again, or for the first time, the books she discusses. And to aid them, she thoughtfully adds a list at the end: Books to Be Read Immediately.—*Robert Saunderson, Berkeley Public Library, CA*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

National Book Award finalist Francine Prose (for *Blue Angel*) is an evangelist for the practice of improving one's writing by reading the great writers. After reading her extremely thorough and humorous analysis of works that demonstrate the highest craft of wordsmithery, it's hard not to convert to her way of thinking, though not everyone will adore her occasionally dictatorial tone or agree with her choices of who is (and isn't) "great." At the same time, she is remarkably fair-minded in her choice of subjects, from Herman Melville to ZZ Packer and Deborah Eisenberg. (And it's worth checking out her list of 117 "Books to Be Read Immediately.") Critics, many of them past or present teachers of writing, universally recommend this book not only in academic settings but also for casual readers, would-be novelists, and everyone who shares Prose's love of language.

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Users Review

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David Rutherford:

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