

How to prioritize which book to read

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1 Question

How can I easily identify the next book I should read when I have over 500 to choose from?

2 Answer

2.1 TL; DR

- Pick highly read books
- Determine why you want to read, this will filter out many books from your list
- Track how long you've wanted to read a book, you're more likely to read ones you recently added to your list
- Fiction: pick based on your tastes of the moment
- Non-fiction/technical: select a few books on the same topic, skim through them, then pick the best

2.2 The details

My first heuristic when deciding which book to read is to consider how many people have already read it by using a site such as goodreads. The reason is that I want to read books that I may be able to discuss with others who will also have read the book. Reading niche books might be interesting, but it makes discussing them a lot more difficult.

For fiction books, I read books from a collection I've enjoyed at least one book. You could basically consider it book "social" proofing. For new books that are not part of a collection and from authors I've never read, I mostly decide based on my interests of the moment.

For non-fiction/technical books, I skim through a few books on the same topic and determine which book I feel the most confident will provide me with the most information presented in the most appropriate and succinct way.

Determining why you want to read will help you figure out what the most appropriate next book might be. You may want to relax and thus reading a technical book may not be appropriate while a fiction book would be. You may want to learn a new programming language and thus reading about a programming language you already know will not achieve that goal.

I suggest using a book tracker like goodreads as it will allow you to track when you added a book to your list. This will let you know how long the book has been sitting in your reading list, waiting to be read. Generally, the longer a book stays "shelved" the less likely it is you will ever read it. This generalizes to stating that most books are read in a LIFO (last in, first out) fashion.