

Anne Bogel

**I'd Rather Be Reading: The  
Delights and Dilemmas of  
the Reading Life**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

**What's in it for me? Embrace your passion for reading with just a tinge of humor.**

Reading has changed the world. But that makes it sound like a chore. The pleasure of books lies in collecting them, dipping into them, giving up on them, and even returning to them later in life.

Books are special; as objects, they have a tangible charm that few can resist. Of course, what you as an individual think about a given book says as much about you as the books themselves. And as for how you

store your many volumes, well that's another subject entirely!

These are issues with which famous readers from the Greek medic Galen to the philosopher Walter Benjamin have grappled. The travails of being an organized booklover have been well documented, but until now few have achieved this with as much humor as Anne Bogel.

In these blinks, you can finally embrace your bookwormery. You aren't the only book geek in the world, and don't let anyone tell you your hobby is anything but an absolute joy.

In these blinks, you'll learn:

- how not to rub other book lovers up the wrong way;
- some strategies for organizing your home library; and
- why there's much to be gained from reading a book a second time.



**Books are windows into the soul, present and past.**

It's the classic question most of us have asked or been asked at an interview or on a date:

“What’s your favorite book?”

There’s a good reason for that. The books you like say a lot about you. They give a real insight into the soul of their reader.

Anne Bogel was asked that very question when she met a new friend over coffee one day.

But she wasn’t ready to divulge. It’s a pretty intimate question

after all, and she was also worried about what this new friend would think of her answer.

If she'd made the case for Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, maybe her friend would think she was a boring old windbag who restricted herself only to the classics.

On the other hand, if she claimed a soft spot for Marisa de los Santos's lighthearted romantic comedy *Love Walked In*, maybe she'd seem a little more fun. The risk was that it might appear that she never tackled serious literature.

But of course, no one has the same favorite book forever; they change. If you remember what your old favorites used to be, then you're also going to be reminded of who *you* used to be.

Just as the smell of a certain kind of floor polish can take you back to old school gymnasiums and memories of vaulting the horse, so books can take you back to certain times in your life.

Maybe you still remember which book you were reading when you took your first trip abroad. Or, more painfully, which books

you chucked out when your heart was first broken. Every book is bound tight to the time in your life when you read it.

But like all memories, memories of reading can get mixed and foggy. That's why it's important to keep a record.

Some vociferous readers even keep diaries, logging key scenes and memorable quotations from books. Bogel was skeptical of such practices at first. She used to simply retort, "I'd rather be reading." But then she became jealous of a friend who kept an especially rich log.

Ever since that moment, she's written a simple log herself. Just when she can, and just a few details: the name of the book, the date, and a little star if she's especially fond of it. Nothing more than that.

It's hardly exciting, but it gets the job done. It helps her to remember all the books she's read – hardly something she could do extemporaneously. All she needs to do is glance at a title, and she'll be taken right back to when she was reading the book. It gives these volumes an afterlife they might never otherwise have had.

*“Sometimes I fantasize  
about getting my hands  
on my library records.”*

**Books are companions to life and mirror the experience of living itself.**

Have you ever been brought to tears of sorrow by the words on the page in front of you? It can start early. Many a child has been deeply affected by stories such as Fred Gipson and Carl Burger's *Old Yeller*, in which the young protagonist must put his beloved dog Yeller down after it's attacked by a rabid wolf.

These emotions aren't limited to childhood, either. One Sunday, the author was listening to Fredrik Backman's *A Man Called*

Ove while getting ready for church. The book's final minutes caused her to weep so much that she had no choice but to wash off and fix her mascara, making her late to the service.

Sure, books can make you cry, laugh, smile and dream. But they can do a lot more besides.

For starters, books can enrich the very experience of what it means to live. We can live vicariously through the experience of protagonists on the page.

Whether it's fresh surroundings, new experiences or even rites of

passage, books are a sure way to elicit empathy. Events like breakups, first dates, marriages or painful divorces are frequently encountered on the page before they are in real life.

The author has often experienced something in real life that she'd already confronted in written form. But for a long time, she wasn't sure if that was a good thing. She wondered whether she'd somehow had the real first-time experience ruined.

In the end, it was a film – about a fellow bookworm – that soothed her worries. In a

memorable scene in *You've Got Mail*, the protagonist Kathleen, who runs a boutique bookstore, is sitting in the subway reading a book describing a butterfly. She then looks up, only to see one floating in front of her.

One day, years later, Bogel was riding a train through Colorado. Lo and behold, a butterfly flitted in front of her and carried on through the car.

The very scene she'd seen in the film happened to her in that train. It had come to life. But the moment hadn't been spoiled. Knowing about Kathleen had made it even more magical.

That sort of experience also speaks for another uncanny ability of books. They just seem to fit situations in which readers find themselves at the time of reading.

Once the author had just started Dallas Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy*. It's about living in the moment. Then her son was diagnosed with a serious condition. They found themselves rushing across the country to visit a doctor. There could not have been a better book to assist her at that difficult time.



**You're always developing as a reader, and you never lose your past experiences.**

As a child, the author read L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*. She was utterly engrossed. Her urge to know what happened next stopped her sleeping. It was the first time she'd finished a book under the covers, flashlight in hand.

Whatever book first gets you hooked, it's only the beginning. As a reader, it will be many years until you come of age. That's because early reading experiences are often guided by

others. Children, teenagers, and even college students are often told what to read.

But the moment comes when you become responsible for choosing your own books. It's truly a rite of passage. For Bogel, this took place in her early twenties. And the experience taught her some important lessons.

Daphne du Maurier's 1938 *Rebecca* showed her how older books could bewitch. She was 22 years old and reading 400 pages a day.

As for Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, it had sat on the shelf for years before she picked it up, also at 22. She'd always assumed that such classics were boring, but that proved to be far from the case.

After these formative experiences, you change as a reader as you mature. But those past reads stay with you.

American author Madeleine L'Engle put it well. She wrote once that the wonderful thing about aging is you don't lose what you've already lived through. Reading encapsulates

that experience. You don't cease to be the reader you once were.

The author is still that three-year-old girl, begging her father to read *The Story of the Apple* once more. She's still the college freshman of 19 grappling with Hume and Nietzsche. And she's still a young woman in her twenties reading *Frog and Toad* to her firstborn.



**Books can help friendships develop, or even damage them.**

We shouldn't let our classic image of the bookworm blind us to the fact the books are essentially communicative and social creations. Reading isn't a synonym for escapism.

Books are a great way to build friendships. One of reading's greatest pleasures is sharing your thoughts about a good book. If you're lucky, you can find a friend who is so in sync with your reading preferences that you could basically term her your *book twin*. She knows

your tastes, enthusiasms and dislikes because you have so much in common.

The author has a book twin who's very capable of guiding her toward the sort of stories of which she's fond and away from the dross.

And the great thing about books is that it isn't just the good ones that build friendships.

Say you're an English teacher but you love revisiting the *Twilight* series. Or maybe you're an English literature major, but just don't get the fuss over *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Great*

*Gatsby*. There's no reason to be embarrassed and keep these thoughts secret. Tell people!

They might even think the same as you do, and not have voiced that opinion, convinced that they were the only one. It could even be the start of a fantastic friendship.

But books are powerful and emotive things. And there's always the risk that they can harm friendships. Well, perhaps that's a little unfair to the books themselves. If you're being *book bossy*, you've only got yourself to blame.

You've certainly seen book bossiness in action, and you've probably done it yourself too. It's that judgmental attitude you have toward other people's reading. You walk into someone's apartment and immediately start scanning the shelves, shaking your head at what you see. An advanced stage of book bossiness involves pushing a book on someone because you think it'll "fix" him.

You may think you're being helpful or clever but you're not. You're just being a judgmental so-and-so.

The trick to recommending is not so much thinking about what will change your friends' tastes or personalities, but what you think fits. That is, focus on what you think your friend *will* like, not on what he *should* like.

*“More books are  
published every Tuesday  
than can be read in a  
whole year.”*

**Being a bookworm comes with its unique set of challenges and opportunities.**

Once you've embraced your status as a true bookworm, you'll discover that you're faced with issues about which only a true booklover knows.

For starters, you'll find yourself buried under mountains of new books every month. How do you go about organizing them?

Begin by ignoring your decorator, your partner, and your feng-shui adviser. You can never have enough bookshelves.

And even if you do run out, don't forget that those lined-up books can double up as a second bookshelf on top of the first.

Secondly, there's no point in having duplicates. Keep the nicer edition and pass the other on. Just get rid of it.

If you must have a second version of a life-changing book, why not go the whole hog and get a stack of them? Books in twos do get a little lonesome. You've got more to gift that way too.

There's another constant problem all book lovers face: too many books, too little time. It's one thing to have many books; it's another to read them all.

This is where deadlines can be useful. Setting one will give you that extra spurt of energy to get through all those books.

Maybe you can make public libraries work to your benefit that way – you'd best finish up those last five books before the fines kick in.

Regular dates for book clubs also help. And coffee with

friends is certainly more of a positive motivation than library due-dates. After all, you can't chat about a recommended book without first having read it.

Being a booklover might sound like a lot of hard work, but you should recognize the inherent opportunities too. It might even be fun to have a shelf set aside for books by people you know, or at least kind of know, or to whose public readings you went. You get the idea.

If you're active in the publishing world, or an author yourself, the odds are that you'll know people who have published books.

Maybe they're your friends and family, maybe not. The point is that this is a part of your collection to which you feel a special personal connection.

Bogel's "friends and family" shelf includes books written by people she's only met a few times, books by Twitter connections, and even volumes from people she feels are basically friends since their work speaks to her so directly.



**There's more to books than meets the eye.**

There's nothing better than the feeling of finishing reading a book. You've digested every word from start to finish.

Bogel's certain that though you may think your journey's over, it really isn't.

What you'll find is that there's a lot to be derived from reading books' acknowledgments and authors' notes.

The author herself never understood the point of doing so: acknowledgments aren't part

of the plot after all. But you can learn a fair amount about a book's author in the acknowledgments, and they can be quite endearing if written well.

To name just one, in *A Great Reckoning*, Louise Penny thanks all those who have been kind in helping her and her husband with his dementia. That care meant she could spend more time with her book and working on the characters.

You can also learn a lot about a story's origins.

Laura Hillenbrand's biography of the famous racehorse Seabiscuit is a case in point. Her author's notes state that once she'd dissected all the obvious sources of information – from newspaper archives to race histories – she even started calling strangers up and placing “information wanted” ads. If you've read her notes, you'll learn in just what sort of unusual places history can end up hiding itself away.

And of course, once you've read the book and its acknowledgments, you can still read the book all over again. It might seem a strange thing to

do and a complete waste of time, especially when there are so many other books out there. But you'll find that by reading a book multiple times – each time in a different place or with a different mind-set – you'll gain more. The book itself will be different, and you'll glean new experiences from it.

That's especially true if a book begins in the middle of the action. For instance, the author had a tough time with the opening to Wallace Stegner's *Crossing to Safety*. She couldn't make head nor tail of all the unfamiliar characters all coming

to terms with a main character's impending death.

But the second time around, the characters were familiar to her. They already felt like her friends. This time the grief in those first pages hit her like a punch in the stomach.

There's a lesson here. A good book isn't just something you get to read once. Every time you reread, you read anew.



## Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Books can tell us so much. They can foster or hinder friendships, remind us of who we used to be and inform us of who we are now. They not only transport us back to key moments in our life, but, when read again, can offer insights that we never noticed or appreciated the first time around.

Actionable advice:

Think carefully about how to organize your bookshelves.

There are many ways you can put your books in order, but there are upsides and downsides to every strategy.

Alphabetizing means you can easily find any book. But you have to remember the authors' names, and it's a touch unimaginative.

Arranging by spine color may look good and visually impress visitors, but it's hardly a practical solution. Also, it may give the impression that you don't understand what books are for...

And how's this for a curve ball? You know the categories from

the board game Trivial Pursuit?  
Why not use that as an  
organizing device? That's sure to  
keep your visitors baffled too!

## **Got feedback?**

We'd sure love to hear what you  
think about our content! Just  
drop an email to  
[remember@blinkist.com](mailto:remember@blinkist.com) with  
the title of this book as the  
subject line and share your  
thoughts!

**What to read next: *How to Read  
a Book*, by Mortimer J. Adler  
and Charles van Doren.**

From the blinks you just read, you've no doubt got a good handle on all the delights and dilemmas of life as a bookworm. But what about the act of reading itself? There are ways to read that are more intelligent and efficient than the method you were taught at school.

*How to Read a Book*, a classic first published in 1940 and revised in 1972, is there to guide you in an improved reading experience. It can be terrifying to be faced with a pile of reports, a literature reading list or a folder of PDFs you have to read, but there's no need to worry. These blinks will show

you how to extract all the relevant information you need and organize your conclusions. It will make you an efficient reader and a superb classifier of knowledge.



**Nice work! You're all done with this one.**

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