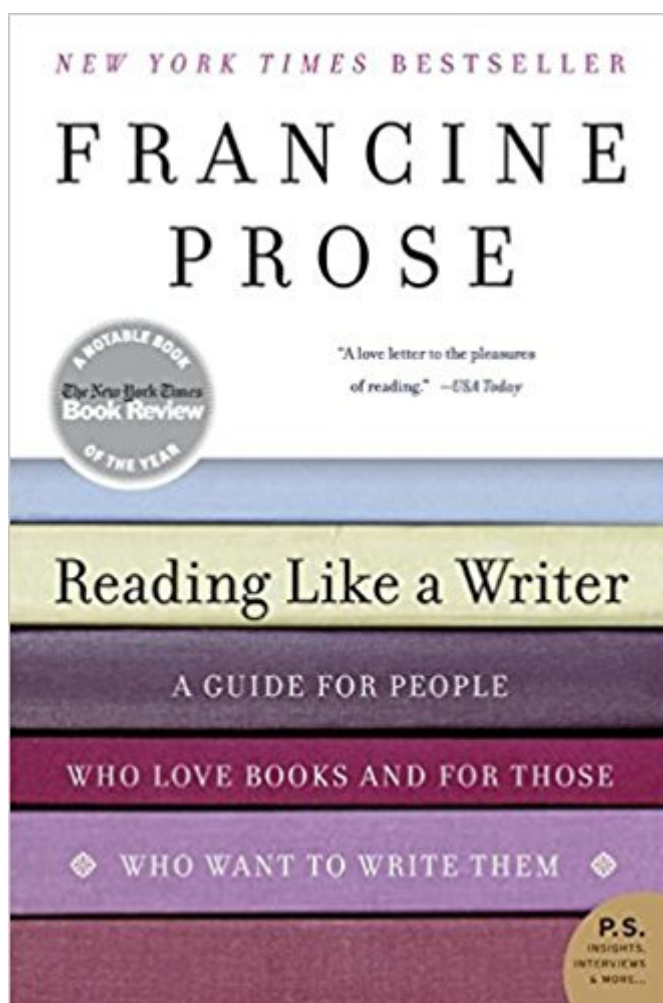


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# Reading Like A Writer: A Guide For People Who Love Books And For Those Who Want To Write Them (P.S.)



## Synopsis

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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## Customer Reviews

Savard has a pleasant voice, a good vocal range and the important ability to emphasize for clarity and drama. She's especially good at the long and very varied quotes Prose has selected to illustrate

the elements of close reading, i.e., paying careful attention to words, sentences, paragraphs, narration, character, dialogue, details and gesture (her chapter headings). Prose has taught writing classes for more than 20 years and published 14 books. To be a good writer or a good reader she argues, you must develop the ability to focus on language and explore line by line how the best writers use each element of language to create unique and powerful people and stories. She pulls out words and phrases from various authors to show us, for example, precisely how Flannery O'Connor creates the literary equivalent of a fireworks display while Alice Munro writes with the simplicity and beauty of a Shaker box. This is an excellent listen that belongs in any reader's or writer's library next to Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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 Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

I found this book to be incredibly helpful. Ms. Prose is clear and accessible, using excellent examples of quality writing and breaking it down into its mechanical parts, without sacrificing the love of the voice of the work. I appreciated the way each chapter was dedicated to a different segment of quality writing. I also appreciated her comparisons to Chekov in the end, showing that even all the principles of good writing she had thus far shared could be chucked in under the right circumstances. A worthy read for anyone interested in becoming a better reader or writer.

I loved the novel *Household Saints* and the movie. I was delighted to read this book and for 271 pages I became a critical and analytical student of literature. Ms. Prose used examples of the great literary master such as Tolstoy, Chekov and Maupassant and contemporary writers such as Denis Johnson. Ms. Prose is an astute professor of writing and she spoke of her Utah class and the von Kleist novel *The Marquise of O*\_\_\_\_. It was thrilling to have her explain the students reaction to a classic masterpiece. This book will transport the reader writer to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and structures of fiction and literature. I highly recommend! Julie E.

As a writer, I found many of the points well taken, and have used them to improve my own writing. That said, it is definitely written by an academic in love with particular authors who is a bit pretentious and anxious to impress the reader with the number of authors she's read. Many of the book excerpts included as examples of exceptional writing are unnecessarily long, and she gives way too many examples to prove a single point. We get it. Additional editing would have been great. However, at the end of the day, it does cause one to think more analytically about word choice, and sentence and paragraph structure. It has made my writing more effective, which was the point after all.

This is another one of those books that had been on my TBR list for years and years, picked up and attempted to start numerous times only to put it down for something more exciting? appealing? interesting? Maybe all of the above. I started this time determined to make it all the way through to the end, beginning purposefully at the end of the year with hopes of using what I learned to fuel more thoughtful and conscientious reading in the coming year. I wanted it to help me better examine, appreciate and/or understand the texts I read in a better way. While reading this book did make me feel better about my slow reading speed, overall I'm pretty disappointed with the experience. It was difficult to get through and inadvertently caused a bit of a general reading slump. I got through very few pages at a time, either getting distracted by other things or falling asleep. It felt too textbook-y, too list-y so much of the time. I wanted Prose to do more with the examples she presented, to use more of her own stories to tie the passages together, more of her unique anecdotes and not just example, example, example. (For this reason, my favorite chapter was the one on Chekhov. I wish the rest of the book had been more like it.) I found myself wishing that more of the references came from more recently written books as I'm not very familiar with a lot of the classics, but also appreciated being introduced to interesting works I haven't yet explored. I didn't always agree with the

author's opinions in regards to the examples she provided, and didn't appreciate the way she would speak as if her interpretations were the be-all, end-all. Clearly, we see here \_\_\_\_\_ "These first words are enough to make us feel \_\_\_\_\_ and consequently \_\_\_\_\_ for the main character'. Don't speak for me, Prose. You don't know how those words made me feel. I am going to use to this experience to influence how I read in 2015, but not the way I thought I would. As a bit of a new years resolution I've decided to put a book down after 100 pages if it doesn't grab me. I have so many books I want to read that it just doesn't make sense to waste my time on something I'm not enjoying simply for the sake of finishing it.

It was a pleasure to read this book. Francine Prose examines dozens of works by authors ranging from Chekhov to Jane Austen to Elmore Leonard. Organized into sections on Words, Sentences, Paragraphs, Narration, Character, Dialogue, Details and Gesture, she gives us the tools so we can look under the hood at art and discover what makes great literature great.

Francine Prose gives us an excellent summary of lesser known inside information about the art of writing. There are lots of examples. It's hard to put my finger on it... she brings topics into the open that we may have simply taken for granted... the length of sentences, pacing... this is not what you would get in most classes on creative writing. And it's a book you can hold and slip pieces of paper between the pages... flip back and forth.

A must have for English Majors, grads, and writers. Seriously, if this book is NOT in your English professor's office on a shelf--- DON'T take their course.

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