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bed. Of course, the amount of time I could commit each day varied, but I tried to slot in my reading whenever I had some time or wanted to take a break from work. Breaking the book up into digestible chunks kept my mind fresh and alert. Akin to building up your running mileage over time, I was slowly building up my reading endurance—allowing me to go for longer stretches in one sitting. Be Easy on Yourself This is probably one of the most important strategies: be easy on yourself—remember that it's okay if you don't understand everything right away. Even after following all of my own advice, when I read Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil, I was still so lost in several parts—it's such a different way of thinking and that can take some time to interpret and rewire your train of thought. But as you continue reading and learning in each discipline or diving deep into a specific author, it will become easier over time. Montaigne's Essays were much easier to understand after reading Nietzsche and Marcus Aurelius, and of course, Ryan Holiday (who makes stoicism accessible for us). I was getting acclimatized to the style of writing during various periods and started to understand some of the famous stoic references sprinkled throughout. Straight up even after doing all this additional work, there were still so many parts of Ulysses that I didn't understand. I told myself that was okay though—I'm not going to absorb everything the first read and it's okay to return and reread the book down the line (maybe in the next year or two). The point is that I did the best I could and am proud for getting through it and learning it to the best of my ability. Joyce knew that Ulysses was the kind of difficult read that would "keep the professors busy for centuries." Read More in the Same Discipline Ryan recommends choosing your next read from the bibliography of the book you just finished. He writes that, "this is how you build a knowledge base in a subject—it's how you trace a subject back to its core." The more you read, the better you become at rounding out your knowledge on a topic. Final Thoughts Big, challenging reads can of course be intimidating, but by doing some homework beforehand and finding the right frame of mind, we can approach challenging texts with much more enthusiasm. We can garner the endurance to get through the long reads as long as we're patient with the process and invest the time and energy to understand it. Would you read a Latin textbook if you only spoke English? No, you would learn at least some Latin first before starting. The same holds true for challenging reads: learn some of the language, the jargon, the major themes, and takeaways before diving in. The more you do this, the easier it becomes, and the more knowledge you develop. There's nothing more satisfying and fulfilling than developing expertise in an area that was once so foreign to you. The most important takeaway is this: figure out why you want to read the text before starting and feel free to test out different frames to see which one provides you with the prolonged energy and motivation to finish. It's a reiterative process and totally okay if you don't get it right the first time. Just be wary of external validation, social currency, or anything ego-related; it will reduce your chances of finishing successfully. Lastly, we should be able to pull something away from every book we read—if we don't, it should be abandoned. I'll leave on a word from Epictetus: Don't just say you have read books. Show that through them you have learned to think better, to be a more discriminating and reflective person. Books are the training weights of the mind. They are very helpful, but it would be a bad mistake to suppose that one has made progress simply by having internalized their contents. Good luck on your next tough read!