

70 Reading Exercises

KIT POULSON

1 Read the book aloud in your head, don't try and process any of the information, just keep on reading.

2 Write down every tenth sentence you read. If this makes you feel irritated remember the writer had to write down all the sentences. Feel empathy with them.

3 Shelf drift, shelf trawl, Walk along and pick the things that snag your eyes as you pass.

4 Judge a book by its cover. Pick colours you like. Line them up in a nice pattern in front of you.

5 Take 5 books read the last 2 pages of each. Take 5 books and read the first two pages of each. Try to connect the beginnings to the ends.

6 Only read the books that have been left on tables or re-shelving trolleys by other users.

7 Read for five minutes, look out of the window for five minutes, repeat.

8 Look at an artwork for ten minutes, use it as an emblem for your study throughout the day. Try to understand things first without it, and then with it.

9 You are going to have to eat all the books in front of you. Think carefully about the amount you can fit in at one sitting.

10 Find a book that has never been issued to a reader, read it.

11 Place a book in front of you. Write down ten reasons why you are not going to read it.

12 Try to translate four lines of what you are reading into another language.

13 Go home, read a book in the bath, then read the same book outside under a tree.

14 Think about how you would explain the page you are reading to a seven year old.

15 Select three books, place them on the table in front of you, read a paragraph from one, then from the next, then from the next. Repeat.

16 Select four books, place one in each corner of a library. Every time your mind drifts get up and walk to the next corner to your left and pick up the book there.

17 Mentally substitute your name for that of the author, think 'I own the arrangement of words in this book'.

18 Collect as many books as you can physically carry, hold them for as long as you can.

19 Search in poetry books for clues to how the aeroplane was constructed.

20 Read a page of a book, then close the book and write the next page.

21 Collect ten books, imagine the authors sitting around you at the table. What do their voices sound like?

22 Collect ten books imagine the authors dancing at a naturist disco.

23 Carefully construct a discreet den from books underneath a table. Crawl inside it with a companion, read to them in a whisper.

24 Spell your name with the first letters of books' titles. Make these books into a reading list. Decide what precise subject this reading list is for.

25 When reading a book written in the Nineteenth Century, separate the language from the ideas. Repeat for a book written in the Twentieth and the present century.

26 Select ten books, reduce their contents to one line. Place the ten lines together, read them and reduce them to one line. Write this one line on a slip of rice paper, swallow it, the next morning on awaking write down the contents of your dreams.

27 Go home, sort your books into a linear order based on the age when you acquired them, tag them with date stickers on the spine. Along the edges of the shelf beneath write a pithy biography.

28 Imagine you are someone whose opinions you dislike. Decide what books they would like, find them and read them.

29 Picture an aunt or uncle in your head. Imagine that the book you are reading was written by them.

30 If you become distracted by thoughts of sex, write these down in an honest but light-hearted style. Place them in an envelope inside the book. Clearly mark the envelope, particularly if your thoughts might be offensive to some.

31 Does the author possess or lack any biological features you consider important for the task they are engaged with? Draw a picture of what the perfect author of the book you are reading should look like.

32 Don't read anything for two days.

33 If a book was written before electric lighting was common read only by natural light, or candlelight. Write a response only using candlelight.

34 Imagine the financial background of each book you see.

35 Use Philosophy books to mentally construct a stylish outfit.

36 Can you produce a cooked egg with the resources of the library?

37 Find the most annoying sentence you can. Use it to write an annoying page.

38 Select three books, spend thirty minutes reading each, with a ten minute break between each. Write a brief précis of each. Tomorrow repeat the exercise.

39 Read for forty minutes; do ten minutes physical exercise; lie down for ten minutes.

40 Hold a book in your hands, visualise the people who value this particular book. Imagine preparing a meal for them.

41 Find twenty words you do not know the meaning of. Write down why.

42 Translate the first line of the Bible from the original Hebrew.

43 As you read, list any non-human living thing that distracts your attention. At the end of the day write a brief biography of each one you have seen.

44 Imagine sitting in the tree, from whose wood pulp the words you are reading are printed upon.

45 Gently toss a book backwards and forwards between yourself and a companion.

46 What is the big problem? Think about how you might find the solution in the library.

47 Fill the space with fog and pulsing lights, but no sound. Read aloud into the fog.

48 Find the angriest sentence you can. Do you think the author is still angry?

49 In groups of three spend a day building a structure from the largest interrelated metaphors you can, return the next morning to see if it is still standing.

50 Transform a page of the prose you are reading into rhyming couplets.

51 Read furtively.

52 Read brazenly.

53 Look at the books the person opposite you is reading, imagine engaging them in an interesting conversation on that subject without words but by finding other books that you think would relate.

54 Imagine a large white horse is in the room.

55 Rearrange the furniture and shelving to your taste.

56 Read a page in the morning, re-read it in the evening. A week later write down what you thought it was about. Then read it again.

57 Sit opposite your companion. Using a book as a source each one of you attempt to elate the other, the other attempt to depress, by passing brief notes back and forth.

58 Walk between five different libraries, reading ten pages in each one.

59 Read as fast as you can, then as slow as you can.

60 Send a love letter to the author.

61 Invoice the author for your time.

62 Put phones, laptops etc in a large see through box with a sealed lid. Place it on the desk in front of you. Every time you feel the need to check social media write down what you think might have happened while you were away.

63 Ask the librarian an interesting question.

64 Select artworks from the images in books and imagine the best ones to place in the library.

65 Hit a typewriter key for every letter you read. Occasionally make the machine's bell ring.

66 Sit at opposite ends of the library, but with E-mail connection. Send your companion a brief précis of your thoughts about what you are reading every 30 minutes.

67 Use the Internet to collect images that communicate the book you are reading. Send them to a companion in a foreign country, unaccompanied by words.

68 Spend the morning collecting images from the library. In the afternoon look at the selection, narrow it down to half then half again, then again until you have only one left. Make a drawing of this image.

69 Read in the morning, at lunchtime find the largest Ice Cream Sundae you can. In the afternoon go to the library.

70 Think about the largest library you have been in, think about the smallest. Imagine their books piled up on a parade ground. Imagine the authors there. Imagine the readers there.

Kit Poulson 2017

Kit Poulson is library residency artist during 2016/17 through a collaborative commission platform initiated by Book Works with Chelsea College of Arts Library and CHELSEA space.

Mutter is the first of Book Works' new Library Residencies Programme which presents a series of residencies and commissions under the title You Must Locate A Fantasy for artists to work with libraries, special collections and archives across the UK.

Organised in response to a moment where libraries face uncertain futures yet hold the archives for potential futures, this project includes this exhibition at CHELSEA space and a forthcoming publication with Book Works, supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, as outcomes to the library residency.

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