

My experience of reading

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How we perceive the world may be similar to how others perceive it, but, from our unique geographies – you're sat directly in front of me, you're off slightly to the side – to our abilities to process phenomena – you're better with images, you're better with words – our experiences of reality are not the same, they are what we call idiosyncratic.

Whether primarily through sight or touch, reading is an application of a sense, of a way to perceive the world.

Reading is a way to augment reality. What happens when you read?

When people read, they often turn symbols – representations of things and ideas – typically on a page or a screen into either sounds or images.

Many people report hearing a voice saying the words that they're reading. Typically this will be their own voice.

Others report the experience of internally projecting words into images, particularly when reading fiction, seeing sentences as fleshed out scenes. You might experience both of these things.

Are you even conscious of the words at all?

Did you know that some people report that when they see markings on a page - letters, words, punctuation - that they just know what's marked out in front of them: their experience of reading is not further abstracted into sounds or images, rather they experience reading as a *Matrix*-esque input of external information directly into their awareness.

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Have you ever felt bored or noticed a sunny day turn grey because you've had to read reams of A4 pages in size 12 Times New Roman font?

Have you ever read a complimentary text from someone you fancy and then found yourself smiling inanely for an inordinate amount of time or even at things you'd normally be stressed by?

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Behind the curtain was a dark, dark room, in the room was a dark, dark cupboard, in the cupboard there was a dark, dark corner and in the corner, there was a dark, dark box, and in the box there was...a mouse!

And the way my dad used to build that up! *A Dark, Dark Tale* only has, say, 16 pages in it, but at three, four, eight years old, the way my dad read it, for us it seemed to last forever: and we knew, we knew what was at the end of this increasingly microscopic, super creepy story, and every other story time we - my little sister and I - would ask him to read it because of the way he'd say the words to make our fists clench and our shoulders tense and our toes curl - just get on with it, Jonathan! our mum would say to a tangled face of annoyed eyebrows but tongue between teeth cheek as he knew how much he'd wound us up with anticipation and our mum up with his deliberation.

So my experience of reading pre-dates my ability to actually interpret written words. My dad read to us most nights - *Beowulf*, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, *The Hobbit*, *The Last Noo Noo* - and even when I felt I was too old for the bedtime story, I still leant over my bunk to hear *how* my dad told it to my sister.

And now, particularly when I read for leisure, there's a distinct voice in my head – perhaps a mix of my own and my father's – that pronounces the words on the page and it conjures up scenes and shows me around and, for a second or two or maybe longer, I disappear from the world and find myself... not elevated, elevated isn't the right word - sometimes I'm submerged - maybe it's consumed... I find myself in a parallel realm experiencing time alongside a hybridisation of the narrative in my hands and my own sometimes beautiful, sometimes dark, sometimes twisted fantasies.

And if I know what the author sounds like - hearing a singer speak their lyrics is particularly interesting - then I'll often find their voice alternately supplanting and melding with my own.

Where are you when you read? When do you read? Do you read different things when out in public to when you're at home? Why?

I know that if I want to tear through a book, I'll read it best lying on a sofa, ideally with a warm breeze traipsing overhead and a can of sugar free icy lemon or fruit twist Fanta sweating on the table next to me. I won't be surrounded by people, and I won't want to talk, I'll just plow on through the pages until I've finished or I'm sleepy, peppering my progress with arbitrary achievements like: go on, read to page 180, then you've read 60 pages a day.

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There's a fine line for me between riding the wave of the passage in my hands and being swept up - me in the setting, but along my own narrative - where I've laughed and borne out frustrations and cried and then caught myself doing those things without actually doing those things.

The experience of reading, then, has not been and is not categorically good for me and I don't always enjoy it, and now, at 26, I read more than I ever have in order to experience more than I ever have.

Reading augments my reality. What happens when you read?