



YOUR ATTENTION IS UNDER SIEGE. FICTION IS HOW YOU TAKE IT BACK.

“Fiction is one of the single best tools you can use right now to strengthen and rebuild your power of attention. We know there is a crisis of attention. Everyone, including me, is suffering from it. Reading fiction puts you in a headspace that is optimized for deep, immersive concentration.

ANDREW PIPER

DON'T JUST READ MORE. READ MORE FICTION.

We've gotten very good at sounding the alarm about the decline of reading. We're much worse at saying what reading is actually *for*. Most defences of reading treat it as information intake: more facts, bigger vocabularies, better test scores.

Fiction does something altogether different. It turns off that constant information processing and gives us a sense of flow:

- **Depth, not scroll.** Today's feeds hand you one disconnected thing after another. A novel asks you to stay with one person, through their ups and downs, for hours.
- **Bodies, not just brains.** Fictional characters are constantly sensing their environments. They touch, look, gesture, and move. Fiction pulls you back into your senses.
- **Small worlds, more focus.** Fiction shrinks the world down to a few people, a few rooms, a few streets, so your mind can settle in and go deep.
- **A door into "what if."** Fiction signals to your brain that you're entering an imagined world, as your mind relaxes into possibility.

Drawing on more than a decade of research comparing thousands of novels with true stories like memoirs and biographies across two centuries, Piper shows what makes fiction unlike anything else we read, and why that matters for our minds *now more than ever*.

FICTION ISN'T MERE ENTERTAINMENT. IT TEACHES US HOW THINKING FEELS.

THINK LIKE A MAGPIE, NOT A COMPUTER

Ask a computer a question indoors, then carry it outside, and you'll get the same answer. Humans aren't like that. We think *with* our surroundings: the sounds, the objects, the people around us. Like magpies, we build our minds out of whatever is at hand. Fiction is one of our best teachers in thinking like magpies: through the body, the senses, and the world around us.

SOME FUN FACTS YOU WILL LEARN

Fiction is so recognizable that a computer can tell it apart from nonfiction from a single sentence about 8 times out of 10.

Even without the words "Once upon a time," fiction tells your brain to slow down and enter the space of imagination.

Compared with real people in true stories, fictional characters touch, see, gesture, and move twice as often.

Fiction is loaded with sensation. It is the technique through which we are able to feel what other people are feeling in stories, and in life.

Fictional characters travel less than half as far as real characters do in biographies or histories.

Fiction builds "small worlds." Even in outer space, characters are most often stuck in capsules and ships. As fiction boils the world down, it builds our concentration.

Fiction is far more likely to be non-linear than true stories.

Fiction teaches us to reckon with the burden of time and be more flexible when it comes to perspective.

The most common object in fiction? Doors.

We might think of doors as magic portals, but usually doors are just doors. They're what we call cognitive niches that ground our thoughts while we follow characters through the world.

THE ULTIMATE RENEWABLE RESOURCE

Fiction is everywhere. Classics, romance, thrillers, sci-fi, young adult, short stories, fan fiction: there is literally a genre for everyone. Don't fall for the myth of needing to read something "important" or "difficult." **Find what you love and dive in.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Piper is a professor at McGill University, where he directs .txtlab, a research lab that studies how storytelling works.

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