



Welcome to the Book Club questions from *The Curious Reader's Field Guide to Nonfiction*.

When your book club discusses a nonfiction book, these questions should give you a lot to talk about. By exploring your reactions to the work, you may learn more about your reading preferences and needs.

The questions are laid out by general themes, following the structure of the Field Guide. You'll need to decide which sections are most relevant for the book you're discussing.

For example, did you read a book that explains complicated topics? Turn to Section 4. Did it really resonate with people in the group? Explore the questions in section 7.

You don't need the Field Guide to use the questions, although they work well together.

Happy reading and discussing!

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Section 1: Assess Your Reading Patterns

These questions ask you to notice your own reading habits and preferences.

Why You Read

Would you have read the book being discussed if it wasn't required for book club?

Did it earn your attention once you started? Why?

Reading Modes

Did you read the book in a skimming mode or a deep, absorbed one?

If both, when or where did you find yourself skimming? Discuss with the group.

Quitting

Were you ever tempted to stop reading this book club pick? (Maybe you quit or lost steam.) If so, where did that happen, and why?

Section 2: Writing that Earns Your Attention

Use these questions to discuss how well a book earns and holds your attention.

The Reading Game

When, if ever, did you find yourself struggling or trudging through the book?

When, if ever, did you experience satisfying moments?

Overall, did you feel like you got enough out of this book to justify the energy you put into it?

Expanding Your Interests

Draw two Venn diagrams representing the overlap of your interest in the topic and the content the author shares in the book. The overlap is the sweet spot.

For example, <add circles>

1. The first diagram illustrates your interests before reading. (If you were lukewarm on the topic, the overlap is probably small.)
2. The second one represents how you feel after reading the book.

Before reading

After reading

Did the overlap grow?

Compare your diagrams with others in your group.

What Makes You Curious?

Write a few fun, crazy headlines that would attract people to the book you're reading. Try using several different approaches, like an incomplete story, an unexpected twist, or personal relevance.

Enticing introductions

Reflecting on the introduction of the book you're discussing, did you read it carefully, zip through, or skip it altogether?

If you read the introduction, did it make you more interested in the content to come? If so, how?

Chapter Endings

Notice the way each chapter ends in the book you just read. How many of those chapter endings are “wrap-ups” and how many contain hooks to keep you moving forward? Do they work for you?

Section 3: Nonfiction Stories

Stories Surround Us

Pick a story from the book and see if you can label the three identifying elements:

Character:

Challenge:

Resolution:

Share your observations with others and see if they match.

Is It Even a Story?

Does the author use any vignettes (scenes without a plot) or incomplete stories in the book?

If so, were they effective? Did you find them memorable or enjoyable?

What's the Point?

Choose one of the stories in the book and determine its purpose. Then compare your ideas with others in the group. Do you all agree? Or did the story land differently with different people? (There's no "right" answer; every reader owns their interpretation.)

Where Do the Stories Come From?

What kinds of stories do you find in the book under discussion?

- Writer's personal experience
- Interviews or research
- News, history, myth, or popular culture
- Other

Do you like the balance? If not, what would you like to see more or less of?

Stories That Invite Us Into the Subject

Does the book begin with a story?

If so, does it pull you into the book?

Stories That Shift Perspective

Looking at the story/stories in the book you're discussing, do you feel that the author is trying to sway your opinions?

If so, did the author's case rely entirely on the story, or did it include data, research, or compelling argument? What was the most effective for you?

Section 4: Great Explanations

Dealing with Abstractions

Did you spot any unfamiliar abstractions in the book being discussed? If so, list a few:

Did the writer help you understand those abstractions, or did you have to work?

Details That Delight

How would you describe the overall balance of detail to abstraction in the book you're discussing?

Is there enough detail for your taste? Compare your thoughts with others.

Analogies That Enlighten

List a few analogies you noticed while reading the book.

Do they help you understand the topic? Share your findings with others. Do the same analogies work for everyone?

Does the Analogy Hold Water?

Did you encounter any analogies that worked really well for you? Share your favorites.

Does everyone agree or are there personal variations in the group?

Thought Experiments

Did you spot any thought experiments? You might glimpse them disguised as short questions directed at the reader.

If you found any, did they make you stop and think? Or do you zoom right past them?

Dealing with Data

Does the author of the book you're reading rely heavily on data, or bring it in for occasional support?

If so, how does the writer make the data come to life?

Data Tells Its Own Story

Do you trust the data (if any) presented in the book? Does the author tell the story behind the data, or do they need to?

Section 5: Memorable Writing

Can You Remember Three Things?

Before you discuss the book, have everyone write down three key ideas they remember.

Compare your lists. How closely do they match?

Your Personal Reference Library

Did the book you're discussing earn a place in your personal library? Why or why not?

Would you give the book to anyone else to read? If so, who and why?

Intentional Repetition

What kind of intentional repetition do you find in the book under discussion?

Does the repetition work for you, or does it seem like too much?

Structural Repetition

Authors often repeat key ideas in structural elements of the book, such as headings or subheadings, graphics, call-outs, and summaries. Does the author of this book use those elements to reinforce memory?

Do they work for you? Why or why not?

Do Acronyms and Initialisms Aid Memory?

Did the author coin their own acronyms or initialisms? If so, can you remember them? See if others in the group do as well.

Sticky Stories

What stories, if any, do you remember from the book? How do they reinforce the book's message?

Section 6: Feeling the Connection

Do You Trust the Writer?

Rate how much you trust this author, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Share your ratings with the others and see where and why they differ.

The Writer's Presence

How do you rate this writer's presence in the book? Would you rather see more or less of them, or was it about right for your taste?

Listening to the Writer

What kind of voice do you "hear" when reading this book?

If you listened to the audiobook, did the voice match your expectations for the author's voice?

The Writer's Tone and Voice

Before the group meets to discuss the book, ask everyone to write three adjectives they would choose to describe the writer's voice or book's tone. Write them down in advance so you do not influence each other.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Share and compare the choices. How much overlap is there?

The idea is not to agree, but to notice variations of interpretation.

Personal Anecdotes

If the author shares a personal story in the book, discuss how you react to it. Does it make you feel more connected to the author, or is it too much sharing?

Look for differences in opinions and tastes.

Humor

Does this book use humor?

If so, does the humor make you feel warmly toward the writer?

Section 7: Writing That Resonates

Personal Relevance

Did the book you're discussing have special relevance for you? Why?

Unexpected Beauty

Pick out a passage that you find striking or beautiful in the book. Then, share your selections as a group.

Do they vary? Do you agree on what constitutes a beautiful passage?

Images and Imagery

What kind of imagery does the writer use in this work? Pick a chapter and see what you can find.

Does the author's choice of images resonate with you?

Poetic Prose

Can you identify any uses of analogy or imagery that transcend the merely functional and instill beauty or poetic resonance? If so, share your favorites.