

# The Curious Reader's Field Guide to Nonfiction

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Field Notes and  
Book Club Questions

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SECTION 1

# Assess Your Reading Patterns

## 2 / Is Your Attention Earned or Required?



### FIELD NOTES: Obligation

» What do you read because you feel you *have* to?

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» What do you read because you *want* to?

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» How much of your overall reading time do you spend on that obligatory reading? Estimate a rough percentage:

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» Is there a difference in the reading experience between required reading and the books or articles that you choose?

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### BOOK CLUB



» 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?

### 3 / How Many Reading Modes Do You Have?



## FIELD NOTES: Reading Modes

» List the last five books or articles you've read. (You can include fiction.) For each, reflect on your reading mode: skimming or deep reading.

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading mode: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading mode: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading mode: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading mode: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading mode: \_\_\_\_\_

» How often do you really absorb yourself in reading?

Daily

Several days a week

Once or twice a week

A couple times a month

Only on vacations and holidays

Rarely

» Which kinds of content inspire you to slow down and savor or read carefully?

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.

## 4 / When Do You Quit—and Why?



### FIELD NOTES: Quitting

» Whenever you abandon an article, book, or blog post, make a note about what left you cold.

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

How far I got: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for stopping: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

How far I got: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for stopping: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

How far I got: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for stopping: \_\_\_\_\_

» Can you identify warning signs you might want to avoid in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### BOOK CLUB



» 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?

## Field Observations: Your Reading Preferences

Track a few observations about your reading life right now. Then return to this list in six months to a year and see if anything has changed.

*Genres I enjoy reading:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Topics that intrigue me:* \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Authors I particularly admire and enjoy  
(and, if I know, why I like them):* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Books I really love:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Blog posts, newsletters, online articles, or other digital reading I enjoy:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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SECTION 2

**Writing That Earns Your Attention**





## FIELD NOTES: The Reading Game

- » As you progress through books and articles, see if the gaming metaphor sheds light on your reading experience.
- » When do you have to add quarters (up your attention investment)? Notice when you feel your attention flagging, you want to skip ahead, or you have to reread a passage to understand it. What's happening in the writing when you experience that?

» Times I had to reinvest in the reading:

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

» Do you think the obstacles resided with you or the writer's craft—or both?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

» Notice, too, every time you get a bit of satisfaction or pleasure — when the reading game is paying off. What's happening then? (Did you love a story or idea, an image, or phrasing?)

» Times the reading paid off:

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter/section: \_\_\_\_\_

What was happening: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: The Sweet Spot

As readers, we all tolerate different degrees of overlap between our interests and the author's. We bring different preexisting conditions to a book —our mood or energy, knowledge and experience, and preferences. And some books simply aren't a great fit.

» For the last book or article you read, ask yourself a few questions:

Name of book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

» How interested were you in the topic when you started?

\_\_\_\_\_

» How did the author expand your interest in the topic?

\_\_\_\_\_

» What percentage of the work did you find yourself really engaged in?

20%? 50%? 80%? \_\_\_\_\_

» Which specific sections really engaged you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» 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.

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.

» Did the overlap grow?

» Compare your diagrams with others in your group.



## FIELD NOTES: Hunt for Catchy Headlines

» Examine online headlines to see if you can link them to one or more forms of curiosity.

- Gap: Novelty
- Gap: Incomplete story
- Gap: Unexpectedness
- Gap: Personal relevance
- Fun of discovery: Useful information, being “in the know”

*Warning:* Not all clickbait targets curiosity. Many posts lead with strong emotions in an attempt to go viral. These kinds of links often contribute to the toxicity of online discourse, so beware of feeding those algorithms.

» Places to look:

- Scroll through social media, including platforms like Facebook where sponsored posts are likely to appear high in your feed.
- Read headlines on trusted or credible news sites for more toned-down versions.
- Ask an AI chatbot to write like a marketer and generate headlines for a specific topic and audience. Inspect the results. These AI chatbots work by learning from massive amounts of online text, so they create a decent composite of what’s happening in the words around us.

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Model(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Model(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Model(s): \_\_\_\_\_

» What kind of curiosity leads you to pick up a nonfiction book? Do you sense a gap, or look forward to the joy of discovering something new?

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Model: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Model: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Model: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.



## FIELD NOTES: Curiosity

» Track what happens in the introductions of the nonfiction books you read. Do they tickle your curiosity? What's the balance of curiosity-inducing work and housekeeping (context-setting and instructions for reading)?

Book title: \_\_\_\_\_

Does it make you eager to continue? \_\_\_\_\_

What curiosity tactics (if any) does it apply? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Book title: \_\_\_\_\_

Does it make you eager to continue? \_\_\_\_\_

What curiosity tactics (if any) does it apply? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Book title: \_\_\_\_\_

Does it make you eager to continue? \_\_\_\_\_

What curiosity tactics (if any) does it apply? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Chapter Endings

- » What happens at the end of chapters in the nonfiction books you read? Look for any examples of authors actively soliciting your interest in the chapter to come, and see if you can spot what they're doing.

Book/Author: \_\_\_\_\_

What happened at the end of the chapter to keep you engaged?

\_\_\_\_\_

Book/Author: \_\_\_\_\_

What happened at the end of the chapter to keep you engaged?

\_\_\_\_\_

Book/Author: \_\_\_\_\_

What happened at the end of the chapter to keep you engaged?

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?

## **Field Observations: Attention-Earning Books**

As you continue on your reading journey, keep track of those books, articles, or posts that do a particularly good job of enticing your curiosity.

Examine what they do, and why. Was it the title? The presentation of the subject in the introduction? How did the author use the techniques described in this chapter to both earn and sustain your attention?

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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SECTION 3

# Nonfiction Stories



## FIELD NOTES: Story Spotting

- » Find a substantive piece explaining a policy or position in a magazine or newspaper, perhaps the Op-Ed section.
- » How many stories does it include?
- » Choosing one, can you detect all the elements of a story?

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

Challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

- » Now pick up a nonfiction book—ideally in a genre other than memoir, history, or narrative nonfiction. Open to a chapter midway through the book. How many stories do you find in the chapter? \_\_\_\_\_
- » Choosing one, can you flag the story elements?

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

Challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

- » If you find any incomplete stories, save them for the next section!

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.



## FIELD NOTES: Partial Stories

» Seek out vignettes and incomplete stories and see how they affect you.

Book or article containing the story fragment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is this passage: Incomplete story? Vignette? \_\_\_\_\_

How does it work for you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Book or article containing the story fragment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is this passage: Incomplete story? Vignette? \_\_\_\_\_

How does it work for you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Book or article containing the story fragment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is this passage: Incomplete story? Vignette? \_\_\_\_\_

How does it work for you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» 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?



## FIELD NOTES: The Purpose of Story

- » Pick up a nonfiction book that you enjoy. Page through it and seek out the stories, both big and small.
- » For each one you find, see if you can identify the primary and secondary purposes of the story. If you're not sure, don't worry. Maybe it's just there to earn your attention.

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Other effects: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Other effects: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Other effects: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.)



## FIELD NOTES: Story Options

» Take a look at a nonfiction book you're reading or have finished recently—one that features stories. Where did they come from?

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

» What does the selection of stories tell you about the writer or their intentions?

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## BOOK CLUB



» 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Opening Stories

- » Visit your own bookshelves or peruse the best-selling nonfiction section of the local bookstore or library. Explore beyond the narrative nonfiction and memoir books, which are obvious sources of story. Instead, search out books on business, finance, science, or self-help. Maybe a book about math?
- » Scout for a story in the opening pages, whether in the introduction or the first chapter. If you find one, how does the story set up the book? If you've already read the book, was the story familiar when you referred back? If not, did it pique your curiosity?
- » Do this a few times. See which stories resonate best with you.

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » Does the book begin with a story?
- » If so, does it pull you into the book?



## FIELD NOTES: Persuasive Stories

- » Search for stories that might inspire you to change your mind. Consider opening a book about a timely or controversial topic, or by an author you may not agree with.
- » Or, visit a news website and check out the Op-Ed pages, where the essays are generally designed to persuade you.

Article/Book: \_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of stories does the writer provide? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did they change your opinion on the topic? Did they clarify your thinking?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did any of the stories feel manipulative? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB

- » 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?

## Field Observations: Favorite Stories

With your story-spotting lens in place, notice the nonfiction stories that you really like. Keep track of where you found them and what purposes they serve.

Source (book or article): \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Source (book or article): \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Source (book or article): \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Source (book or article): \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Source (book or article): \_\_\_\_\_

Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_



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SECTION 4

# Great Explanations



## FIELD NOTES: Noticing Abstractions

- » When reading, pinpoint the abstractions in a passage or a page. Catch as many as you can.
- » Did any of the abstractions slow your reading, either because you didn't know them or you had to think, even for a second, about what they meant?
- » Write down a few of the trickier words that required a moment to understand.

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- » Write down a few of the ordinary abstractions you encounter (animals, food, transportation).

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## BOOK CLUB



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

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



## FIELD NOTES: The Balance of Abstraction and Detail

- » As you read books and articles meant to explain topics, pay attention to how the writer reinforces abstract concepts with details and examples.
- » Can you detect a balance? Is it 50/50? 75/25 abstract to detail? The balance will change according to genre.

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Abstract-to-detail ratio: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Abstract-to-detail ratio: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Abstract-to-detail ratio: \_\_\_\_\_

- » What's your preference for the ratio?

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.



## FIELD NOTES: Analogies

- » Read an article addressing a complicated topic, or pick up a book about science, finance, or any subject requiring explanation for the non-specialist.
- » Pinpoint where and how the author uses analogies.
- » Do they rely on a single analogy to explain a larger topic? And, is it a simile or a metaphor? Does it make a difference to you as a reader?

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Simile or metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Simile or metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Simile or metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Assessing Analogies

- » Read an explanatory article or a chapter from a book, and flag any analogies that helped you understand the topic.
- » Examine each. Does the comparison work for you? Does it feel fresh or have you seen it before? Does it make a worthwhile point or emotional connection? Do you think it worked the way the writer intended?

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Analogy: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Thought Experiments

- » How do you react when you encounter thought experiments in your reading? Do you actually do them in your head, and if so, do they give you a fresh perspective?

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- » Can you remember any thought experiments that have had a major impact on your understanding?

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Data That Explains

» What data-driven publications do you read? List a few that come to mind (if any).

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» Can you think of any authors or books that do a great job of explaining data? Do they use stories to suppose the data?

Author/book: \_\_\_\_\_

How they handle data: \_\_\_\_\_

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Author/book: \_\_\_\_\_

How they handle data: \_\_\_\_\_

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Author/book: \_\_\_\_\_

How they handle data: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BOOK CLUB



» 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?



## **FIELD NOTES: Data Sources**

» As you read about discoveries in science or medicine, pay attention to how you regard the data. Do you examine it, or simply trust the writer or publication? Does your response vary according to topic (how little or how much you know)?

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Data cited: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you trust it? \_\_\_\_\_

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Data cited: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you trust it? \_\_\_\_\_

Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Data cited: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you trust it? \_\_\_\_\_

## **BOOK CLUB**



» 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?



## Field Observations: Great Explainers

Now that you can spot elements of great explanations, pay attention to which are the most important for you.

As you encounter writers or publications that do a great job of explaining, list them below. And notice, if you can, why they excel. For example, are they adept with elements like analogies, stories, or dealing with data?

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/publication: \_\_\_\_\_

What they do well: \_\_\_\_\_

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SECTION 5

# Memorable Writing



## FIELD NOTES: Three Things to Remember

» Pick three pieces of writing: the last nonfiction book you completed, a favorite nonfiction book, and an article or post you read yesterday. For each one, test yourself. Can you remember three key ideas from each? Do you think those are the ideas the writer would hope you remember?

The last nonfiction book you finished: \_\_\_\_\_

Three ideas:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

A favorite nonfiction book: \_\_\_\_\_

Three ideas:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

A blog post/newsletter/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Three ideas:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Again, don't worry if you cannot remember three. A blog post or article might succeed if you retain one memorable idea.

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## BOOK CLUB



- » Before you discuss the book, have everyone write down three key ideas they remember.
- » Compare your lists. How closely do they match?



## FIELD NOTES

» Check out your personal reference library. Peruse the books (and e-books and audiobooks) you save, the articles you bookmark and actually plan to return to, the things you clip wanting to save.

» What kinds of works do you stash for future reference? Why?

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» How often do you dip into your reference stash? Regularly? Occasionally? Rarely?

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» If you had to move to a home with only one bookshelf and could bring only nonfiction works, list 5 books that would make the cut, and why:

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you'd keep it: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you'd keep it: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you'd keep it: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you'd keep it: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you'd keep it: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Repetitions

» As you read a book that explains a topic, check for how often a key idea repeats in the same chapter or later ones.

» Which of these methods do you find?

- Rephrasing
- Stories or thought experiment summaries
- Poetic repetition
- Other forms: \_\_\_\_\_

» Do the repetitions help you remember the key points?

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» Which techniques reinforce memory for you?

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## BOOK CLUB



» 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Structural Repetition

- » Seek out repetition in structural elements in books, articles, and blog posts. Search for key ideas from the text rephrased or repeated in headings, subheadings, graphics, call-outs, or summaries.

What elements does the writer use? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you even notice them as repetition? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you find them annoying? \_\_\_\_\_

Did these elements help you remember the key concept(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » What structural elements, if any, does the book being discussed use to reinforce memory?
- » Do they work for you? Why or why not?





## FIELD NOTES: Acronyms and Initialisms

» Reading an article online or in a newspaper, write down any acronyms and initialisms you encounter:

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» Did the writer define them the first time they occur? \_\_\_\_\_

» Did you remember what they stand for (or an overall gist of what they refer to) as you kept reading? \_\_\_\_\_

» Do you detect any violations of the AMAPI rule (meaningless acronyms or initialisms)? \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» Did the author coin their own acronyms or initialisms?

» If so, can you remember them? See if others in the group do as well.



## FIELD NOTES: Memorable Stories

» Consider any nonfiction books you have finished recently. Can you remember a story from one of them? If so, describe it below.

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» Did the story reinforce the message or theme of the book? In what way?

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## BOOK CLUB



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

## Field Observations: What Sticks with You?

As you go about your reading life, make a note of the books or articles that stay with you, or that you think you will remember months from now.

List the key ideas you remember from each, and why they stuck. Here are a few possibilities:

- Repetition
- Compelling stories
- Emotional context
- Thrilling plot or unexpected twist
- Relevant content for your situation
- Humor

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

What stuck, and why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

What stuck, and why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

What stuck, and why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

You might refer back to this list in later years and see how much you recall.

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SECTION 6

# Feeling the Connection



## FIELD NOTES: Pay Attention to Trust

» What are, for you, the instant red or yellow flags you encounter in a new book? (For example, the author's voice, convoluted sentences, cavalier treatment of facts, etc.) Do they stop you from reading, or do you raise your caution level and proceed?

Red flag: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you keep going? \_\_\_\_\_

Red flag: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you keep going? \_\_\_\_\_

Red flag: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you keep going? \_\_\_\_\_

» How quickly do you decide to trust the author of a book? (first page, first chapter, fifty pages?)

\_\_\_\_\_

» Think of a book that you've started reading and instantly knew you would love. What inspired that feeling?

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why you loved it right away: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» 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.



## FIELD NOTES: Presence

» As you read a nonfiction book or article, take a moment to assess how present the writer is as a persona. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being absent, 10 being memoir), assess where the presence calls. And then, would you prefer more or less?

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Author presence (1 to 10): \_\_\_\_\_

Would you rather have more, less, or the same: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Author presence (1 to 10): \_\_\_\_\_

Would you rather have more, less, or the same: \_\_\_\_\_

Book/article: \_\_\_\_\_

Author presence (1 to 10): \_\_\_\_\_

Would you rather have more, less, or the same: \_\_\_\_\_

» In general, do you enjoy glimpses into a writer's life in advice, how-to, or other non-memoir forms? Does your preference depend on the genre? The writer?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

» How do you feel about reading articles or posts generated entirely by AI? Should it be disclosed as the writer?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Your Inner Narrator

- » When you read, take a moment and listen inside your head. Do you hear a specific voice as you read? \_\_\_\_\_
- » If so, what kinds of voices do you assign to the different content you read? Do they vary with the work and what you know about the author?

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- » When you read fiction, do you cast different voices in your head?

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?





## FIELD NOTES: Assessing Voice

» Consider a nonfiction book you are reading or have read recently. Come up with three adjectives to describe your perception of the tone and voice of the work.

» Here are a few options to inspire you:

Conversational, formal, academic, confessional, warm, funny, supportive, expert, empathetic, cynical, journalistic, erudite, authoritative, playful, inquisitive, intimate, reflective, nostalgic, humorous, passionate, optimistic.

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

» What do you like about the author's voice?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

» What leaves you cold, as a reader?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



» 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.

» Then share and compare the choices. How much overlap is there?

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



## FIELD NOTES: Getting Personal with Story

- » As you read, flag any personal stories from the author. How does the writer portray themselves in the anecdotes? Are they funny? Vulnerable? Expert?

Personal story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The writer's stance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Does the story make you feel close to the author in any way? If so, why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.



## FIELD NOTES: Humor in Nonfiction

- » List a few of your favorite nonfiction authors who use humor in their work. For each, how would you characterize their humor? Gentle wordplay? Self-effacing comments? Funny asides or footnotes?

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Humor: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Humor: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Humor: \_\_\_\_\_

- » How important is humor to you as a reader?

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » Does this book use humor?
- » If so, does the humor make you feel warmly toward the writer?

## **Field Observations: Authors You Connect With**

Keep track of authors and writers with whom you feel a connection. For each, think about why you feel this way. Does it come from stories? The quality of their ideas? Their voice? Humor? All of the above?

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Why I feel connected: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Why I feel connected: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Why I feel connected: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Why I feel connected: \_\_\_\_\_

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SECTION 7

# Writing That Resonates



## **FIELD NOTES: Keeping Your Eyes Open**

» Do you ever experience the hand of the Celestial Librarian? If so, when?

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» What kinds of content does it deliver?

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» How can you make more room for the Celestial Librarian?

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## **BOOK CLUB**



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



## FIELD NOTES: Finding Beauty

- » Do you actively seek out beauty in your nonfiction reading?
- » List a few nonfiction books you find particularly lovely to read.

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why it's beautiful: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why it's beautiful: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Why it's beautiful: \_\_\_\_\_

- » What do you most appreciate in these works: the “sound” of the prose in your inner ear? The images? The depth of the ideas?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Images

- » Choose a page or two of a book or article you're reading and search out every bit of imagery you can find—anything that appeals to the senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell. Look for descriptive words, unusual verbs chosen from the physical world, and turns of phrase that invoke objects or experiences in the physical world. Be sure to include idiomatic expressions like *break the ice* or *in a nutshell*.
- » For each, notice what senses the image might appeal to, whether you found the image interesting or dull, and if it held any positive or negative associations for you.

Image: \_\_\_\_\_

Senses: \_\_\_\_\_

Was it interesting? \_\_\_\_\_

Positive/negative? \_\_\_\_\_

Image: \_\_\_\_\_

Senses: \_\_\_\_\_

Was it interesting? \_\_\_\_\_

Positive/negative? \_\_\_\_\_

Image: \_\_\_\_\_

Senses: \_\_\_\_\_

Was it interesting? \_\_\_\_\_

Positive/negative? \_\_\_\_\_

Image: \_\_\_\_\_

Senses: \_\_\_\_\_

Was it interesting? \_\_\_\_\_

Positive/negative? \_\_\_\_\_



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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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?



## FIELD NOTES: Get Poetic with Metaphors

» How does the Democracy passage make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

» Which analogies do you understand, and which have lost their meaning many decades later?

Analogies that I don't get:

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Analogies that still work well for me:

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» For fun, try to channel your inner E.B. White and write a whole series of analogies to explain an abstract concept.

Here are a few possible topics, or provide your own:

- Great writing
- Courage
- Vacation

Go all in on this creative exploration. Come up with images from different areas, like White did. The power comes from piling them up into a mountain of metaphors.

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## BOOK CLUB



- » 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.

## Field Observations: Books That Really Resonate

In your past and current reading, which books resonate deeply with you? Was it because of the content and message? The beauty of the prose? The combination of both?

Keep a running record to revisit periodically.

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_