

READING *ANNA KARENINA* WHILE YOU DROWN IN MOUNTAINS OF WORK

(IT CAN *ACTUALLY* BE DONE)

In your academic career, you are probably going to read a lot of books. Regardless of what you plan on studying in college, it's inevitable that you read a few. Now, this doesn't seem like something that would be especially difficult, but anyone who's done it will tell you that it is. You may not want to read the book, or even like it, but you have to read it anyway. Add in the fact that you have about a hundred other assignments to deal with, and that the reading is due on specific days, so you can't just read it all the weekend before the class finishes, and it gets surprisingly complicated. Even if you did actually want to read the book, you may find yourself checking the sparknotes ten minutes before class starts and having no idea how you got there.

As someone who personally likes reading, it may be a surprise to some of you that up until about this year, I used to actually read my school books very rarely. Sure, I'd read some of them if they were books I really liked, but with most of them, that wasn't the case. I'd read the first few chapters, and then the sections I needed for the essays at the end, but that was it. Even when the class was covering a book I really *wanted* to read (I honestly tried with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it just didn't happen), I couldn't do it. Then, this year, I read all 822 pages of *Anna Karenina* on time, if not ahead, of the class. Shocker, I know. Not only did I manage to do that, but I did it during October and November, which had both the due date for college applications and the end of the first quarter right next to each other. So yeah, stressful time. But I still did it. And it was worth it. Not only is *Anna Karenina* the greatest novel ever written, but for the in class quizzes and the essays you'll have to write, sparknotes just isn't going to cover it. With a book that long and that complex, you're going to need to have read almost every single page to actually do well in the class. Also, you really should read it, just for your life. It's phenomenal.

Taking on this momentous task may seem impossible, but luckily for you all, as someone who has already been there and done that, I have some advice. Now, these were written with *Anna Karenina* in mind, but they really apply to any book you want to read, be it for school or just in general. So, without further ado, here are 5 tips to get through *Anna Karenina* (and actually read it)¹.

¹ Number 3 will SHOCK you

1. Tell yourself you're going to read the book. And I mean all of it. This may seem useless and unnecessary, but if you start an 822 page book without the full intention of finishing it, you're not going to get past the first 50 pages. This is especially true with an assigned book, since you have set deadlines to have amounts read by and you may or may not want to read this book in the first place. If you start off with the intention of using sparknotes every once in awhile, or whenever you don't feel like reading, you'll never actually read anything. You'll tell yourself that you have too much homework, or you're too tired, or you're really just not in the mood, and next thing you know, the class has finished the book and you haven't actually read more than a few chapters. If you start out with the intention to read the whole thing, then you'll find time. And if you do reach a point where you really can't keep up and you need to use sparknotes, that's fine, but if you actually try to read all of it, then you probably will. Don't tell yourself you'll try, tell yourself you'll do it.
2. Keep the book with you as much as possible, and read it whenever you can. There are plenty of times in life where you won't have something to do. Waiting for a ride or in the waiting room for the dentist's, sitting on a train, a long car trip, doesn't matter what, life is full of waiting. If you have the book that you want to read with you as often as you can, then instead of filling that empty time by scrolling through your phone or daydreaming, you can use it to catch up on reading time. I actually spent very little time at home reading *Anna Karenina*, especially towards the end. Most of my reading was done on the metro during weekends, or waiting for a girl I was babysitting at her school bus stop. I'd read at school during a free period (especially if my other homework was something I could do while listening to music or watching TV), after a test or quiz while the rest of the class was finishing up, or during lunch if I knew I'd be busy later in the day. If you keep the book with you, then any time you have a few minutes with nothing to do, you can read a few pages, so when you're at home and you actually have other things you'd rather be doing, you can spend more time on those.
3. Read ahead every chance you get. This may seem impossible, especially in the beginning when the story hasn't quite started yet, and the readings seem ridiculously long. But it *is*

possible, and incredibly useful. Once you finish the reading that's due, if you can, read more. On days where a reading isn't assigned, read more. There are going to be times when you have way too many assignments to be able to cram in 35 pages of a Russian novel, and if you read as far ahead as possible, that means that when those days roll around, you'll be all set. Now, it may be tempting to read ahead one day, and then just skip it the next. It's a lot harder to get yourself to read when you don't have to. But trust me, it's worth the effort. Save up an extra reading or two for the times when you really need them. Even though it seems impossible in the beginning, it gets easier as the novel progresses and you actually get interested in the story. If you're worried about forgetting what happened in the reading, since you read it a few days ago rather than the night before, don't be. It's a lot easier to hold on to the details of stories than it is textbooks. Plus, if you do have trouble, glance over the sparknotes to orient yourself and you'll be golden.

4. Plan ahead. This is kinda an add-on to #3, but it's important enough to get it's own number. If you know that you're going to have a busy week, do at least some of that week's readings during the weekend before, or on a day you'll have less going on. If you have two days to do a reading, read at least half the first day. You don't know how much work will be assigned tomorrow, but for today, you know what you have to do and how much time you have. If you have more work the following day, then you'll be glad you did at least half of the reading the day before. If you end up having less work, I would advise finishing up and then reading ahead (#3), but even if you don't, you'll have gotten yourself a nice day to relax or work on a long-term assignment, like an essay or project. You'll appreciate the extra time you saved yourself
5. If you do find yourself at a point where, try as you might, you can't get a reading done on time, sparknotes it, *but then go back and read it for real*. Personally, I think there are very few instances in which it's actually impossible for you to read the book. Barring some exceptions, you can always find time somewhere. Sacrifice a half hour of sleep, read during lunch or break, read on the way to school, find a quiet place during homeroom, whatever. You can almost always find time somewhere. An important part of

this is knowing your schedule (#4), so you can plan accordingly. But, if you really do have a day where there is no possible way for you to do the reading, find out what happens in that part of the book, but when the school day is done, go back and read what you missed. By making yourself keep up, you'll be less likely to end up giving up or just letting yourself use sparknotes all the time. You have to keep yourself accountable, or nobody will, and you'll never finish the book.