

C.S. Lewis explains the differences between good and bad readers best in his book on *An Experiment in Criticism*. Here is a summary:

1. Bad readers never read anything twice, but those who read the great works will read the same work ten, twenty, or thirty times during the course of their life.
2. Though bad readers may be frequent readers, they do not set much store by reading. They turn to it as a last resort and they abandon it with alacrity as soon as an alternative pastime turns up. Good readers, however, are always looking for leisure and silence in which to read and to do so with their whole attention. When they are denied such attentive and undisturbed reading, even for a few days, they feel impoverished.
3. The first reading of some literary work is often to the literary, an experience so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed. They have become what they were not before. But there is no sign of anything like this among the other sort of readers. When they have finished a book, nothing much, or nothing at all, seems to have happened to them.
4. As a natural result of their different behavior on reading, what they read is constantly and prominently present to the mind of good readers. They mull over their favorite lines and stanzas in solitude. Scenes and characters from books provide them with a sort of iconography by which they interpret or sum up their own experience. They talk to one another about books, often, and at length. Bad readers seldom talk or think about their reading.
5. The unliterary never read anything that is not narrative. This doesn't mean that they all read fiction, but that they only want the "EVENT," when it comes to reading anything. They demand swift-moving narrative. Something must be happening always. They have no patience for internal dialogue, character development, or descriptive passages.
6. The unliterary have no ears. They read exclusively with their eyes. They are deaf to the aural sounds of reading.
7. The unliterary are unconscious of style and cannot differentiate between good and bad writing. You can give them descriptions that really describe, dialogue that can produce some illusion, characters you can distinctly imagine and they are bored and just pick at the book and eventually cast it aside.
8. The unliterary only enjoy books in which the verbal element is reduced to a minimum.
9. The unliterary seek only vicarious happiness or some kind of escapism in their reading, not the fullness of literary experience.
10. The unliterary "use" books, and do not "receive" books. Using a book means that you treat it as assistance for your own activities or preconceived ideas, whereas receiving a book means that you exert your senses and imagination and intellect according to the pattern invented by the author.

The last page of Lewis' book is brilliantly stated and sums up beautifully the feelings of a good reader. It is in itself one of those passages that you savor and linger over with delight: "Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realize the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. We realize it best when we talk to an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less than a self, is in a prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others... In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do."