The Classics Companion Journal

A printable journal for finishing the big books - context, cast, progress & rescue

Free sample - three real pages: The Companion Method, plus the first two pages of a Classic Dossier (Start Here + The World in Ten Lines). Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

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How to Use This Journal - The Companion Method

The whole system on one page (journal p.3). The five moves the whole journal is built around, so every later page makes sense.

1. Context before chapter one.

Open a dossier and fill its first two pages before you start the book: your edition, your pact, and the world in ten lines. Ten lines of context read in advance will save you a hundred moments of fog later. If all you have is the introduction in your own copy, that is a legal and sufficient source.

2. Small daily pages.

Choose a pact you can keep on a tired day - ten pages is a noble pact. Ten pages a day is a 600-page classic finished in two months, and it compounds: readers keep pacts that feel easy. Miss a day and nothing breaks. Books this old are patient; the book is not keeping score, and neither is this journal. There are no streaks here to lose.

3. Guides are lawful.

Introductions, chapter summaries, lectures, podcasts, reading groups, this journal - consulting help is not cheating, it is what scholars do and have always done. Reading a summary of the chapter you just read, to check what you missed, is a technique, not a confession. Write your helps down in the dossier so you remember which ones were good.

4. Name the hard part in advance.

Almost every famous classic has one famous hard part - the whaling chapters, the war essays, the fifty pages of a stranger's confession, the chapter everyone abandons. Find out where yours lives, mark it in the dossier, and plan for it. A wall you can see coming becomes a waypoint: the hard part is on page 310, and I am on page 260, and it is fifteen pages long, and people have crossed it for two centuries.

5. Finish your way.

Finishing includes finishing with the book: shelving it with honour, at page 200, having genuinely tried, is a real outcome with a real page in this journal, not a failure state. And when you do close a classic for the last time, the verdict that goes in your canon is yours - not the blurb's, not the syllabus's. The reputation is data. Your reading is the evidence.

A dossier takes about ten minutes to open and two minutes a day to keep - a line in the ledger when you stop, a word in the log when you look one up. The rule from our other journals applies here too: a journal you keep up beats a beautiful journal you abandon in February.

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Dossier Page 1 - Start Here: The Dossier

Everything about your copy and your reasons, fixed on one page before chapter one - because with classics, the edition is part of the book (journal dossier p.1).

Classic No.: _____ Title:

Author:

First published (year): _____ Country / language of origin:

Form: [ ] novel [ ] epic poem [ ] plays [ ] essays [ ] memoir [ ] other

My edition - publisher & edition name:

Year of this edition: _____ Introduction by: _____ Notes by:

Translator (or: written in my language - no translator):

Translation year: _____ Total pages in MY edition: _____ Chapters / parts:

Why the edition gets a whole block: translations differ the way performances differ - the same novel in two translations can read like a brisk modern book or like wading. Older translations may be abridged or bowdlerised without saying so. If the language feels dead rather than old, the translation may be the problem, not the book - and changing translation mid-book is allowed.

Why this classic (the honest pull - a film, a friend, a sentence seen quoted, sheer stubbornness):

Why now:

What I've heard - the reputation going in (write it down now, so the finishing page can argue with it fairly):

My pact: _____ pages per reading day Reading days per week: _____ Optional target finish date:

Where I'll mostly read it: _____ My travelling copy plan (if it's a brick):

Helps I will use without shame (tick + name):

[ ] The introduction in my edition [ ] Chapter summaries

[ ] A lecture / podcast series [ ] A reading group or read-along [ ] A film/TV adaptation after the book

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Dossier Page 2 - Context: The World in Ten Lines

Hand yourself the furniture of the world - the ten lines of context that prevent a hundred moments of fog (journal dossier p.2). Ten prompted lines, in your own words.

1. The year this was written/published, and what was happening

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2. Who ruled, and how ordinary people felt about it

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3. The money: what a small income / a fortune actually meant

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4. The technology on the page (travel, letters, light, news)

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5. The war, invention or upheaval in the background

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6. What people believed (religion, science, medicine)

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7. The manners that matter: what was scandalous, what was proper

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8. Who had power and who didn't (class, gender, money, birth)

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9. How this book was published (serial parts? banned? a sensation? ignored?)

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10. The one thing the first readers all knew that I most need to know

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The Author in Brief:

Born _____ - Died _____ Age when writing this book:

Where they lived:

What else was happening in their life while they wrote it:

One thing they believed that this book argues with:

Three things to hold in mind while reading (in your own words):

1.

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2.

3.

Source for this page (an introduction read in advance is a complete and respectable source):

This free sample holds three real pages of The Classics Companion Journal (46 pages: the Companion Method, the Classics Dashboard, the Journey Index, the Someday Shelf, four complete six-page dossiers - Start Here, The World in Ten Lines, Cast & Places, the Progress Ledger, Language Notes with a two-translations comparison, Threads & The Hard Part - the Stuck-Point Rescue pages, the Finishing Pages, the Personal Canon, the Next Classic Picker and the Classics Awards - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). It is not a Read & Reflect Edition: those pair one classic with Pagelyra's written companion; this is your own apparatus for all the rest. All live at pagelyra.vercel.app