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The business plan is a planning tool with a number of audiences and secondary uses. Its primary purposes include testing ideas to see their probable effect on the company, and measuring performance against goals or objectives. Important outsiders who may read a company's business plan include investors, lenders, suppliers and executives who may be joining the company. The core management team should be intimately involved in the writing and updating of a company’s business plan. Instead of filing the plan away and forgetting about it after the company begins operations, management should keep the plan close and use it for its intended purpose — planning. The first edition of a business plan should point out the problems management is facing, along with the intended remedies. Subsequent plans should track the progress in those problem areas. The financial section of the plan can show the results of improvement efforts over time. In many cases, the first outside readers of a business plan are the private investors who have expressed interest in investing in the company. Such investors range from sophisticated venture capital firms to local angel investors. These people want to know about return on investment, exit strategies, break-even points and why anyone would want to buy the company’s product or use its service. Bankers and other lenders want to gauge the creditworthiness of company principals, and see what kind of collateral or guarantees might be available to support a loan request. At nearly every stage in its development, a company will want to have the best possible payment terms with its suppliers. A start-up business will want to negotiate deferred payment terms of practically any length. A company that has been succeeding in its industry will want the best possible payment terms. If a supplier’s credit manager can learn more about the company by reading its business plan — or at least the financial section — the company might be able to negotiate favorable terms. If a company has been involved in searching for a senior executive to join the management team and has decided on a particular candidate, it may be the right time to make a significant gesture. Management can grant him access to the plan for a certain period of time, after he signs a non-disclosure agreement. This gesture delivers two messages to the candidate. He sees that the company is serious about making an offer. He also sees that the company takes planning seriously and may turn out to be a well-run business — a place where he would like to work. Other than the artist's rendering of the exterior of the house, most of a house plan won't look much like a house. Instead, it's filled with standardized symbols that represent parts of your house. When a builder looks at house plans, he sees doors, windows, walls and electrical outlets, represented by symbols. Once you understand the symbols on a house plan, you'll see the house the way he does. Here are some basics on reading plans:House plans are drawn to scale, meaning that when you multiply the lengths of the lines in your plans by a previously determined number, you wind up with their length in real life. There are no absolute scales used for all house plans, but commonly the minimum scale for a site plan is 1 inch equals 20 feet. For foundation, floor plans and elevations it's 1/4 of an inch equals 1 foot, and for sections and details 3/8 of an inch equals 1 foot [source: National Council of Building Designer Certification]. Because a plan is drawn to scale, it shows everything exactly as it will be built relative to everything else around it -- even though it's obviously much smaller than your house will be. For example, this means that an exterior wall that looks thicker than an interior wall on your plans will, in fact, be thicker in real life. To get a feel for scale, look at one of the floor plans and calculate the real-life measurements of a major room. Then compare those measurements to rooms in the house where you live now. Imagine the remaining rooms, hallways and traffic flow in your plan relative to this room you've measured out, as well, to help you get a feel for your future home.Nearly every feature commonly seen in houses is represented by a standardized symbol on a plan. For example, there are nine common symbols to represent various types of doors, ranging from French, to swinging, to bi-fold, to accordion [source: eHousePlans.com]. Search online or work with your architect or builder to understand these many symbols (and see our handy guide above). It's worth working to understand at least the symbols for doors, windows and electrical outlets.Specifications: In addition to showing what your house will look like and how big each room will be, it also will describe how these parts will be made and what they should be made of. Your specifications sheet describes fixtures, appliances, materials and other homeowner preferences. Even if you buy premade house plans, you may still have significant wiggle room to change its specs. Consider picking wallpaper, stains, paints, fixtures, hardware and other materials [source: Byoh.com]. I love the physical nature of having books up there on the bookshelves, waiting to be looked at, admired, and remembered. I used to really enjoyed the library and I still do. But when I look at my shelves I realize that I own so many books that I haven’t read.This post originally appeared on Medium.I bought them because I learned over time that for me to own a book–intellectually–I needed to own the damn book. I needed to have it close by for reference. I needed to be able to write in it and take it down off the shelf and put it back on the shelf and take it down off the shelf and put it back on the–you get it.So I went about building my “anti-library” of unread books, and today, even after giving away hundreds of books, my shelves are stocked with books I haven’t read. But I keep adding.Looking at my shelves recently, I saw a book I’d wanted to read for the longest time, and in fact had started over the summer, stopping after about 150 pages to move on to more “immediate” reads. The book I put down was The Power Broker, by Robert Caro. It’s a classic on power politics in New York in the early to middle 20th century, seen through the eyes of the brilliant and wicked Robert Moses. The glory and curse of the book, though, is that it’s a doorstopper. It runs at about 1,110 pages — dense ones. I think Caro said it came to about 700,000 words. (Which was down from his original finished draft of over a million.)It’s awesomely well written, not a slog in any sense of the word, but even great books take time just due to sheer volume. The problem is, when you think about reading a book like that, even taking it off the shelf seems to generate anxiety. Let’s do the math: I’m a pretty good reader, I think I read in the neighborhood of 300 words per minute. It might be plus or minus 50 words, but my guess is that’s a close estimate for a text written in modern english prose.At 300 words per minute, a 700,000 word text is going to take me 2,333 minutes, or about 39 hours to read. And there’s the issue: the brain doesn’t seem to like to get started on 39 hour projects it isn’t being paid to complete. So, most commonly, we pick something shorter and easier. Still counts, right?Then I thought about all of the other great works I wanted to get to in my lifetime. Caro has four (eventually five) books about LBJ that are masterpieces on 20th century American politics. I want to read Gibbons’ Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. I want to read Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina and War and Peace. I want to read Boswell’s Johnson. Shirer’s Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations. More of Ron Chernow’s biographies. (Titan is one of my favorites of all time and I hear great things about Alexander Hamilton.) All doorstoppers.That got me thinking. How the heck does anyone get these books read? How do I become a person that’s read all these books rather than talked about them? I do a lot of reading for Farnam Street, but it’s hard to take a week off from our standard fare to sit and read War and Peace. It’s the same for any busy person with a profession that takes up their days.The solution I devised for myself is a simple one: It’s 25 pages a day. That’s it. Just commit to that, and then do it. What will 25 pages a day get you?Let’s say that two days out of each month, you probably won’t have time to read. Plus Christmas. That gives you 340 days a year of solid reading time. 25 pages a day for 340 days is 8,400 pages. 8,400. What I have also found is that, when I commit to a minimum of 25 pages, I almost always read more. So let’s call the 8,400 pages 10,000. (I’d only need to extend that 25 pages into 30 to get there.)With 10,000 pages a year, at a general pace of 25/day, what can we get done?Well, like I said at the start, The Power Broker is 1,100 pages. The four LBJ books are collectively 3,552 pages. Tolstoy’s two masterpieces come in at a combined 2,160. Gibbons is six volumes and runs to about 3,660 pages. That’s 10,472 pages. That means, in about one year, at a modest pace of 25 pages a day, I’ve knocked out 13 masterful works and learned an enormous amount about the history of the world. In one year!That leaves 2017 to read Shirer’s Rise and Fall (1,280), Carl Sandburg’s Six Volumes on Lincoln (2,000?), Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations unabridged (1,200), and Boswell’s Johnson (1,300) with plenty of pages left to read something else.This is how the great works gets read. Day by day. 25 pages at a time. No excuses.Before anyone takes this too literally, the point isn’t the number. (Although 25 pages is my literal rule.) It could be 20 pages, or 10 pages, or thirty minutes, or an hour, or 2,000 words, regardless of what “unit” of reading you choose, the math will still work out: In six months, or a year, or five years, or ten years, you’ll have digested a large swath of human wisdom. Did you ever want to read Moby Dick? Or Ulysses? Or some of Jane Austen’s books? Or David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest? Done! Start today. 25 pages. Then do it tomorrow. Read in the morning, read at lunch, read before bed, read at the dentist’s office, it doesn’t matter. Just get your pages in, day in and day out. And then you’ll be a person who reads the books everyone else simply talks about.What you choose to read is up to you. I love history. I love biography. I love science. Tolstoy aside, I don’t read many novels. But the task no longer seems daunting, does it? All it takes is commitment and a little assiduity. So let’s go get smart.Shane Parrish writes for Farnam Street. You’re interested in actionable wisdom, right? Connect with Farnam Street on Facebook and sign up for our free weekly newsletter to gain the insights others are missing. Image by iunewind (Shutterstock).

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