

## In 2022, I decided to get away from screens and read more books. It was wonderful

Nancy Jo Sales, *The Guardian* (19/12/2022)

The digital age is changing us in ways we would never expect. If you had told me 20 years ago that I would one day stop reading books, I would have said you were crazy. I've always been a reader; from the time I was little, I would hide away somewhere with a book and devour it, often in one sitting. Cut to 2021, when I realized I had only read five books that year, and the previous year, only eight.

5 I didn't have to wonder why. I already knew it was my phone. We see our phone's own calculation of how many hours we've spent on it each day, and we can't quite believe it. Hours, I realized, that I used to spend reading books. So, I made a New Year's resolution for 2022: more books, less phone. I set a goal for myself of 50 books. And I almost made it.

10 This is how I did it: I looked at what times of the day I had more or less free, which was when I first woke up in the morning and before I went to sleep. I designated these as my reading times. I set a rule for myself that I couldn't get out of bed and start my day until I had read 20 pages, and I couldn't go to sleep at night until I had read another 20 – so 40 pages in all, every day.

15 That would add up to nearly 15,000 pages, which – divided by about 300 pages per book – would add up to about 50 books. (I figured since some books were less than 300 pages, too, the numbers would all work out in the end.) Piece of cake, right?

20 At first, reading 40 pages a day was incredibly difficult for me after years of staring at my phone. When I woke up in the morning I had to fight a burning desire to pick up a device and start clicking and scrolling, but this was no longer allowed. I was shocked to see how my brain balked at the rigor of reading now; it was troubling to me. Was I ever going to get back my concentration, my ability to truly immerse myself in a book? The answer is yes. You can fix your distracted brain. You can return it to its more receptive, focused state – how you remember it being from before the days of mobile phones. And you can do this by reading.

I treated my brain like a muscle that needed stretching. I went slowly at first. I picked easy books to begin with – easy, that is, in their clear and simple language (which is actually my favorite kind). I was gaining speed in my readings. Books I'd meant to read over the last couple years were finally getting read.

25 I was not only going faster – I was getting back the feeling of being inside a book, no longer wondering about what was going on on social media or in the news. I was restoring my relationship with reading and replacing my addiction to my phone. I was not only reading in bed now, but on subways, planes – where everyone around me was typically looking at screens (and, yes, they might have been reading, too).

30 And that makes me sad, because reading is wonderful for you. And it does wonderful things for our society. Reading literary fiction has been linked to having more empathy and the ability to engage in critical thinking. For me, it's also fun; there's no experience more magical. I feel like I time-traveled to the 19th century in 2022 because I read Megan Marshall's amazing biography *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*. It was one of Fuller's great missions to get women educated – to get them to read. Because she knew that with reading comes freedom, liberation, the ability to think.

35 I read 46 books in 2022, following my new practice. I'm upping my daily count to 50 pages per day in 2023, hoping to finish 60 books. I'm excited about the stack I've already picked out. I know I'm still a lightweight compared with some, but it feels like I'm on the right track. Going back to reading, I feel like myself again. Did I mention I'm also sleeping better, and feel happier too? Could it be because I'm spending my time reading books rather than caustic comments on Instagram and Twitter? It just might be.