Effective Reading Techniques for the Swamped Debater

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Introduction:

This guide is designed to help you read in an effective way that will increase the amount of information you can extract from a text and decrease the amount of time it takes to extract it. Debaters are not only required to read a lot of material, an impossible amount really, they are also required to remember what they've read and to call on what they've learned for the purpose of research and in the impromptu debate prep room. I hope that these techniques and strategies will help you accomplish all of those tasks.

Sometimes, it can actually be detrimental to read every word of a text because it is easy to lose sight of the big picture and keep all the information straight.[1] However, I will not just promoting *skimming*. Skimming can be a very helpful tool, but only when it is done in tandem with other tools. You have to make sure that you don't "skim past the important stuff" and that the information actually sinks in. These techniques will help you to read texts faster, and do some skimming, without losing important contents. They are also designed to keep your reading relevant to debating by constantly putting what you read into relevant contexts. While reading, you want to develop a strong grounding in world affairs and historical background and, at the same time, extract debating-useful arguments, facts, and ideas. This guide will hopefully help you do both effectively.

The most important thing to begin with is maybe something of a paradigm shift. We often think of reading as a *bottom-up* affair. We read a text and it "yields-up" information to us. One most important part of effective reading is to think of it also as a *top-down* activity. The more information and structure you can bring with you to a text, the easier it will be to collect information from and about it. Further, we often think of reading as a kind of *passive* practice - all we have to do is read the words and we get all the content out that way. Reading the words is not enough. Think of reading as an *active* practice: you should constantly engage with the text while you read. Active reading using top-down mechanisms will help you remember the contents of a text better, and help you categorize and utilize that text to crush your opponents in the future.

Remember: reading is a *skill*. Like any other skill, it requires practice and constant reinforcement. So reading this guide will not be enough to make you a more efficient reader. To do that, you will have to practice reading in this way. You will thank me later when your coaches and later your university professors assign a heart-stopping amount of reading...

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[1] You may, however, want to read every word of this text ;)

I: Before you even start reading

Texts carry a lot of revealing information about themselves on the "outside". Before you even start reading a text, you can learn a lot about it that will help you read it in an effective way.

Creating a basic text profile: you should always answer the following basic questions before you begin reading any text. Answering them will tell you a lot about what you should expect to find. Knowing what to expect and what is likely to be important makes getting to the point easier. Instead of starting to read and waiting for the author to tell you what the text is about, you can already be looking for and expecting information, facts, and arguments. Having some expectations, even if they are wrong, makes you far more efficient and receptive to information. Note: with a bit of practice, this whole section should take you less than 5 minutes for any text. Much less time than it will likely take you to read this section. But it can save you hours of reading time.[2]

1. *When* was this text published? Knowing when something was written will tell you a lot about what it might be about. For example, books written about US foreign policy that are published between 2001 and 2009 (the George W. Bush years), and those published between 1993 and 2001 (the Clinton years) are likely to be very different. Books written about global warming, about the Middle East, and about North Korea - just a few examples - will be about very different issues depending on the year. As you get a better sense of a timeline for global issues, you will know what to expect from a book on any of these topics based on the date they were published.

2. *By whom* was this text *written*? Knowing the author is not the same thing as knowing the author's name. The author's name (unless the author is famous) usually doesn't tell you very much. Books will almost always have a blurb about the author on the dust jacket or first or last few pages. If you are not reading a book, a quick Google search can usually give you the information you need about an author. Author details tell you what kind of information you might be looking for in a text. You will be looking for different kinds of arguments about stem sell research from an official document of the French government, from a professor of molecular biology at an American university, or from a pastor of the southern United States. You can expect very different material from a text written by a philosopher of ethics about abortion as compared to a personal memoir written by a sexual assault victim, or a young mother. This probably sounds obvious - knowing who wrote a text helps you know what to expect from it - and it *is* obvious. But think how often you actually take the time to learn about an author before reading a text? This is helpful because you can almost always know what kind of argument you, the debater, could use from a text based on who the author is.

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[2]Note that, in practice, these questions are difficult to split up as I have done below. You will likely answer several at once and in varying orders. But thinking of them as separate pieces of information will help you organize your thoughts and notes.

3. *How* is the text *externally labelled/described*? Take a moment to think about the title of a text. Read the blurb on the back. Read the abstract of an article. Or, think about what section of the newspaper it is in (business, science, world, etc.) or what library section you found it in. Again - this is obvious. Start with the title, right. But it is amazing how often we skip this information because it seems *too* obvious. You can almost always guess what side or dimension of an issue an author is interested in by reading the title of the book. And you will get a good sense of the issues at stake and the topic of a book by seeing how it is categorized, what it is called, and what the "external matter" says about it. If you want a more revealing sense of a book, you can also scan its Index and see what concepts and themes have the longest lists of page references. Those terms are likely to be central.

4. *What images* accompany the text? Are they emotional (like a hungry looking child)? Or are they technical (like a chart or a graph)? Are they of people? Or are they of buildings? Animals? Maps? Images can give you a enormous sense of the point, evidence and topic of a text. You should skim through a book or an article at this stage *just* to see what pictures are in it. You will learn a lot about what kind of evidence the text is going to use (will it contain statistics? will it contain emotional stories? will it refer to scientific results? will it plot changes over time?). Humans, cross culturally, use a lot of visual aids to represent data and support evidence. Flipping through to look for images will often tell you what kind of evidence and arguments a text is going to use, and what kinds of arguments you can therefore use yourself in a debate. Will this text give you a human emotion story with which to begin a debate speech about the degradation of indigenous land? Will it give you a list of statistics to cite about gender representation in EU politics? Will it give you rates of change in the temperature of the oceans? You will find that evidence and arguments are often concentrated around visual representations of certain kinds and this observation alone can make it easier to get what you need out of text. What if a text has no images? Then you know in advance that you will have to approach this text in a different way (to be discussed below).

5. *What* is the *structure* of a text? Scan the Table of Contents if there is one. The chapter names will likely give you as much information as the title of the book. We often skip the table of contents but it is literally a road map that we can use to help us navigate a text. You will also get more of a sense of the author's position on certain issues, and you will know more about the contents, themes, and ideas you will learn about by reading. You may even realize that you don't need to read a lot of the chapters in a book, if they are not relevant to the information you went to the book to find. Take note of that structure: is a text chronologically structured (e.g. does each chapter cover a certain number of years)? Is a text thematically stuctured (e.g. does each chapter cover one dimension of the same major issue)? Is a text demographically structured (e.g. each chapter is about a different group of people)? Knowing how information is organized tells you an amazing amount about where to look for what you want.

6. *Where* is the text *written* and *where* is the text *about*? These are two separate and very important questions. Once you have a sense of the topic, the theme, the general position, the types of evidence to be used, and know something about the

author, you will likely be able to answer these "where" questions. You will want to keep track of the geographical relevance of each text you will read: is a text about the Middle East, the EU, China, the United States, the Developing World generally, Africa etc.? But you also want to note where the writer is coming from. Knowing that an article is a translation from an Israeli newspaper and it is about Iran tells you a lot about the text. Knowing that a book is written in South Korea about Cold War politics tells you a lot. Knowing that an author is Mexican and writing about genetically modified crops tells you a lot. Keep in mind the geographical positions of the content and the author of each text you encounter. This is helpful when you are putting a case together and you need to represent more than the North American perspective on an issue. This is also helpful for keeping notes - you may want to group, especially your notes about geopolitical topics - according to region using two axes: the geography of the content and the geography of the author.

Once you have answered these very basic questions, you can formulate a pretty basic profile of the text. For example, check out the book *Stem Cell Research* by Lillian Forman using the Google Books preview at http://books.google.com/.[3] I have not read that book, and you needn't either, but you can still get a pretty good idea about what is going on in it in just a couple of minutes. Look especially at the Table of Contents, the photos, and find the author information on the last page of the Google preview. You will be able to tell a lot about the text without reading any of the internal content. Practice by writing a quick note for each of the basic questions above for that book. Remember - don't read anything from the book except chapter titles, titles, and blurbs.

Once you have created the basic profile for a text, you are ready to establish some top-down architecture that will help you read it effectively, taking only what you need, and getting that information ready for use in a debate. Remember that creating your text profile should take you no longer than 5 minutes and usually much less than that.

II. Top-Down Architecture

Now that you have a basic profile for a text, you can set up some top-down pieces of architecture that will help you take notes and help you skim that text effectively. These devices are designed to help you extract information in a form that is useful to debating in addition to securing general background knowledge without reading every word.

The idea: You have a lot of debating experience with different kinds of motions and different kinds of opponents. Use that experience to brainstorm in advance what kind of debates a given text might be helpful for and how it might be helpful. Since you are reading for debating, that brainstorming will help you decide where to look and how to skim in a text to maximize your reading efficiency.[4] This section offers suggestions for brainstorming based on your basic text profiles and how to turn that brainstorming into top-down structuring mechanisms and how to take notes using them. NOTE: if you can't answer any of these questions as you go, don't think twice about it and move on. They

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[3] Search for Stem Cell Research Lillian Forman

[4] And if you go on to read heaps and heaps for some other reason - Law school, university, work, class, etc. - you can simply rework these top-down components to reflect the needs of those arenas.

are only useful when they are useful and when they are not, just continue along. The work of this section can take up to ten minutes, but not much more depending on the text.

1. I suggest beginning each read with a single sheet of paper or a new computer text editing file. Write a point form condensed version of your basic text profile at the beginning of the page.[5] If you are working on paper, I suggest using pencil. You will modify your notes as you go. While we can know a lot in advance, you will often want to edit, restate, modify, or delete some of your initial ideas as you go.

2. Ask yourself: what *type of motion* is this text relevant for? At the World Schools Debating Championships there are motions about ethics/morals, sports, economics, geopolitics, science, etc. Many texts you will encounter will be obviously relevant to only some of these categories. A book about stem cell research is most obviously relevant to ethics and science. A newspaper article about genetically modified crops is most relevant to science and geopolitics. Add those categories to the top of your note sheet. If you are reading a text primarily for establishing background knowledge in a certain area, ask yourself *why is this important*? Why was I asked to read a text on this topic? What issues am I expecting to find in it? What relevance do those issues have for contemporary geopolitics, ethics, or science? Background knowledge of history, mythology, philosophy, ethics, and so on are only useful to us when we keep in mind what they are a background for, and why that background is helpful. Knowledge for its own sake is the best kind. But knowledge that acts as scaffolding for yet more knowledge for its sake is even better.

3. Ask yourself: what *motions* have I seen for which this text might be relevant? Have a list of previous WSDC motions on hand and see what motions from it this text might be relevant for. It is not enough to know that a book is about economics. You want to know what *kinds* of economic motions a given text might speak to. That way you aren't just looking in it for "economic arguments" you are looking for statistics about inflation or conceptual explanations of how the housing crisis transpired. Try to brainstorm some debating motions of your own for which it looks like this text would be the Holy Grail. This activity puts the text into the context of debating motions, which are a specific kind of animal. Add a few choice motions to the top of your notes as examples for which this text might be useful. As always, be prepared to modify them as you learn more about the book. There is a lot of evidence from psychology that the power of suggestion is incredible. Have you ever noticed that once you hear someone use a word for the first time, you start hearing it everywhere? Chances are, it was being used before but you didn't notice it because it wasn't on your radar. Having relevant debating motions on your radar already before you begin reading a text will make pertinent information and related ideas pop out at you far faster and more reliably than beginning a text with a blank slate.

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[5]Note-taking is very personal business. Each individual will benefit from different note-taking structures. What I suggest here is just a place to start. Modify, throw out, change, redo, etc. as you see fit. Play around with note-taking. Once you have a system that works for you, that actually helps you remember the things you want to remember, it will be with you for your life. Rely on your experience flowing and keeping notes during debates, and your note-taking during class to inform your playing with reading note-taking. All require you to quickly organize and make sense of a lot of information. Think of note-taking as an exercise in memory.

4. Ask yourself: what *arguments* have I seen or can I come up with for each side of this motion? As you know, many motions have some pretty common arguments on both sides. For example, on the issue of quotas for women in parliaments, those opposed almost always claim there ought to be a meritocracy and those in favor almost always claim that when a meritocracy develops too slowly or is impeded by large-scale cultural bias some artificial intervention is needed. Think of those stock arguments for the example motions you came up with. That way, you are not just gleaning information from a text, you are already thinking of that information in the context of motions and arguments that the text could inform. That is exactly the kind of top-down structure that can cause a text to reveal to you something useful or interesting that you might not otherwise have seen, and that allows you identify what sections of a text might be the most important.

5. Ask yourself: what *side* is this text likely to support? Based on what you know about the author, the images you saw in the text, the external labeling, the title, and the chapter titles, determine which side of each of your example motions this text would support. The answer to this question is not always obvious. Texts, especially books, tend to voice many positions on certain issues. But there are sometimes tell-tale signs that will help you determine whether this is a prop or an opp resource. Also remember that *many texts can be both*. Debaters often find uses, statistics, information, or stories that can help them on either side of a motion. For example, stories about starving children can often work on both sides of the "TH supports GMOs" debate. And never forget that we can only assume so much about people - one of the best parts of reading is that you can always be surprised. Keep your guiding hints in mind, but always be prepared to throw them out.

6. Prepare a list of key-words. Using this brainstorming, create a list of key words, people, ideas, concepts, etc. that are relevant. "Inflation", "Don't Ask Don't Tell", "Defaulting" etc. These key-words will help you skim. It is always preferable to be skimming *for something*. This can be very difficult, and is only sometimes useful. Skimming a book about missile defense for the word "missile", for example, is not likely to be helpful. However, skimming a history of Global Warming debates for "Kyoto" might be very helpful. You may not have any idea what words to begin with, but as you work through a text, you might find some. Think of key-words as just one more guiding hint to suggest to your brain what it might be looking for. The more you read and the more you learn the easier it becomes to think of what you might want to look for. If you are reading you a book, you may want to check its Index after you have created a list of key-words. If you find your words in the Index with a fair number of references, you have likely anticipated this book well.

7. Look to your sheet of notes often when you finally begin reading. Edit when needed, and remind yourself what's at stake in the debating world for the content of this text. Constantly engage your top-down structuring mechanisms. This will keep your reading relevant to debating, debating motions, and debating arguments. However, it will also help the information sink in and stabilize more generally for background knowledge. The more analysis and active engagement you bring to a text, the better you will remember and synthesize what you have read. Also, once you are done with a text, your notes will be the end product of this back and forth between bottom-up

and top-down and, in my experience, these notes are the best organized and the most useful.

CAUTION: Obviously, all of these brainstorming points oversimplify texts and motions and you haven't even started reading the text at hand yet! DO NOT think of this exercise as an attempt to box up a text before you even read it. It is an attempt to put a text into the context of *debating*. Debating is a particular kind of activity with a certain kind of structure and for which a certain kind of information is useful. The more you can put a text into the context of debating before you read it, the more you will find that relevant information in it. Always be prepared to modify, edit, or completely abandon this initial structuring. However, in my experience, it is always better to come to text with *some* structuring and contextualizing tools, rather than coming to it without any maps at all.

III. Where to look

Once you know what you want from a text, what kinds of arguments for what kinds of motions you are after, you go to the text to get them.

The premise: Different kinds of information are located in different parts of a text. If you know you want a general conceptual idea from a text or statistics or scientific results, or an anecdotal emotional story, or historical details, you look to different places in the book. In this section I will point to some places and recommend some reading habits that usually give you a lot of what you will be looking for. This is where the skimming comes in. Skimming should be done selectively, cautiously, and in the context of your top-down "debate context" brainstorming. Go back to those notes often. NOTE: The general structure of *most* published non-fictional (and some fictional) information is GENERAL - SPECIFIC - GENERAL. Whether it is a scientific text book, an autobiography, or a political manifesto, authors often begin with macroscopic ideas, then unload the details, evidence, examples, and specifics, and then return to the general themes and main points at the end. This is true of texts as a whole, and of sections and individual arguments as well. This general observation makes the mining of information from a text much easier. If what you want is the general idea about something - e.g you want an abstract opposition to genetically modified foods - you can find that kind of thing in introductory and concluding sections of books, chapters, and articles. If what you want is statistics, details, actual events, actual moments in history, actual cases, or specific facts, you will usually find them in the middle meat of texts, often concentrated around images, graphs, charts, quotations, and so on. Using these general observations about how information is communicated, we can skim the right parts of texts, effectively. Also note that this is very similar to the structure of a debating argument. Debaters must use logic to make their macroscopic arguments, and then have evidence, facts, and specifics to back them up. Looking for help with the different parts of debating arguments therefore maps quite nicely onto the structure of texts. You might find help with arguments in the introductions, and then examples in the bodies of chapters, for example. Here are some pointers for finding and reading important parts of texts.

1. I recommend reading the *introduction* and the *conclusion* of *every* text. In books, there is usually a introductory chapter and a concluding chapter, and I suggest

reading these. You don't have to read them very closely, but don't skim them haphazardly either. In journal or magazine articles, there is often an introducing and concluding paragraph or section. Read these, and you will almost certainly be introduced to the major claims the author is making and the topics that will be covered in a book. Further, there is a sizable amount of evidence from psychology that you will remember best the things you read first. As such, why not start with the heavy hitting, high-level arguments of each text. That will help you develop background knowledge and keep texts straight. The typical organization of published texts in Western languages (I can't vouch for Eastern languages because I don't read any) is to set the scene, give some background, and state your intentions and your stakes up front and then hammer home your main points at the end once you think you have established them. Go and get that information from the introduction and the conclusion first (and don't worry about what doesn't make sense in the conclusion, just focus on what does). Go back to your brainstorming notes and your book profile and edit where necessary.

2. If you are reading a book, I suggest reading the introduction and the conclusion of each chapter as well. Again, don't agonize over every word, but read closely enough that you really know what is happening inside each chapter. This will help you to fine tune the motions and the arguments that you brainstormed for this text at the beginning and identify chapters that might contain the specific kinds of arguments you are hoping to get. Further, if you are reading a book for background instead of as a source of potential arguments or facts, you will get a helpful framework for storing that background this way.

3. If your brainstorming and profiling of a text has led you to believe that it will be a good source of *statistics* or quantitative facts, go looking for charts and graphs. Scientific and quantitative data is often concentrated around visual representations. Read the paragraphs or sections surrounding graphs and charts, and study those graphs and charts. This will usually yield the kinds of facts you are after. Record them. When possible, record them under or around motions and arguments that you brainstormed for which they would be relevant. If they seem useful or interesting but not to any of the arguments you brainstormed, create new motions, or just record them in a miscellaneous section.

4. If you are reading a highly quantitative or scientific text that does not have images but you still think what you want from it are statistics, you have to do a bit more work. Recall the general introductions from subsections and chapters - which of those introductions set the stage for the kind of statistical information you might want? Then go and *skim* the meaty middle sections of those chapters. Recall the list of key-words you created in the previous section. Modify the list according to the chapter introduction and then go and look for those words. Look for numbers. Look for textual signs of the kind of argument you are expecting and hoping to find based on your profile, brainstorming, and introduction/conclusion readings.

5. If you are not expecting a text to be useful as a source of statistical or quantitative information but instead, or also, as a source of ethical, personal, or conceptual arguments, you will have to find them. Sometimes this can be done with images, but usually not. Recall what you learned about the structure of a text by looking at

the Table of Contents, or the way that the information was being laid out. Think for a moment about where in that structure the information you want might be found. If you are reading a text that lays things out thematically, this can be easy. What theme are you interested in? Go and skim that chapter, looking for key-words in the text. If a text is laid out chronologically, think whether or not some specific interval in time (in a person's life, in an economic period, or during a war, for example) might be particularly pertinent and skim that section. It is difficult to give generally applicable suggestions for this, but remember that you will usually find the general information and ideas in the beginnings of sections and conclusions at the end. That should help you determine what of use you might find in the middle, and then go looking for it. Again, keep notes and edit your profile and brainstorming notes as you go. Often, if it's more abstract stuff you're after, you might not need to read the innards of chapters.

6. Sometimes you won't have any real sense of where to go or what to get from a text. And in such cases, I recommend generally skimming the middles of relevant chapters. It is very easy to get lost and to become unable to follow a text when skimming. That is because usually people just move their eyes across the page and hope some information gets in. More often than not, reading this way does not permit us to retain any information. Here are some points for skimming effectively:

   (a) Read *whole sentences*. Instead of jumping around all over the place, actually read the whole first sentence of each paragraph, for example. This will allow you to basically follow the progression of a text, but cut the actual reading time down by a huge percent.

   (b) When a sentence sounds like it precedes a thought that might be useful for you, read the whole paragraph. Skimming is about reading less; it is not about not reading.

   (c) Always keep in mind a list of key-words, and modify that list constantly, to give you something to read for.

   (d) *Stop and think* often. Take stock of where a text has been and where it might be going. Think about what you've been reading. Look back to your notes. Stopping to think allows what you have seen to sink in. This, combined with note editing, gets the big ideas into your memory more effectively.

   (e) Always look for *hints* and *sign posts*. Stop skimming as soon as you have a sense of where you might go to find some useful information. Only skim as a means to find the important parts of a text to which you can give more attention.

In general, we think of texts as linear beings. We begin at the beginning and read through to the end. I propose that we need not read texts this way. Jumping around, reading the beginning and the end together first, looking for signs of useful arguments, and skimming when we don't know where to go, is almost as effective as reading every word and certainly more effective than aimlessly skimming from the beginning to the end. Use your brainstorming and your profile as a roadmap, and constantly update it, to keep your reading efficient, active, and less time consuming...

Remember to stop and think about debating often. Think about possible motions, possible arguments as you go, and keep all your reading in constant conversation with the debating for which you will use it later.

IV. Say it Out Loud

When you think you have finished with a text, you are happy with your notes, and you feel comfortable checking it off your list, don't just yet. Speak out loud the main points you took from the text. Use arguments or statistics in a sentence the way you would in an actual debate. This serves at least three purposes. First, the more mediums with which we engage an idea, the better we remember it and the easier we can call on it. Adding speech to reading and writing gives another medium of support to the ideas. Second, saying things in your own words ensures that something has sunk in. If you struggle to articulate the points from a text, it is likely that they haven't sunken in and you might need to spend more time with it. Third, debate is about speaking. As you know is is very different to *know* something in your mind and to be able to deploy that knowledge in speaking. Articulating arguments after reading a text is great practice and will make all the difference when you want to articulate them later in an actual debate. If you found a text particularly interesting, or if you have some time to spare, also do the opposite. Pretend that the author is your opponent in a debate and articulate a counter argument to his or hers. (And I know that all debaters secretly make arguments out loud when no one's listening...)

V. Conclusions, Caveats, Cautions

Make active top-down reading your own. This is just a guide of recommendations built from the subjective experience of one, alas, ex-debater. Find what works for you, add and remove steps, find your own set of questions if these don't work for you. There is no one way to read effectively. I highly advocate bringing an active mind already equipped with questions and specific debating contexts and reading selectively for efficiency, the rest is up for grabs. Only with practice can you develop your own most effective way (and you will likely be getting a lot of practice very soon...).

Since you are a talented debater, I suspect that you are really very interested in global issues for their own sake, and perhaps all this talk of efficiency and utilitarian mining of texts makes you cringe. It makes me cringe a bit as well since we are all committed to the general task of learning and knowing for its own sake. In an ideal word we would all read every word of all texts and learn slowly and thoroughly what they have to say. In reality, however, we have to pick our battles and make ourselves efficient gatherers of knowledge so that we have time to really commit ourselves when it matters. I do not think that "reading" is ever a stand alone activity. We are always "reading for _ _ _ _ _", and we insert the relevant term: pleasure, work, essays, class, research, debating, fun, passion. These "for's" often overlap, but there is always one. Structuring our reading according to the "for", even if we'd rather read everything and know everything in principle, frees time and cognitive energy for the important "for's": passion, interest, fun, research. When you discover a truly interesting topic or a truly gifted author, or a truly beautiful argument, give it your full attention. Read every word. When you need to finish four briefing papers in a month, write three essays for your classes, stay on top of world affairs by reading

three magazines and five news papers, AND stay sane by keeping some science fiction on your night table (which obviously everyone should...) you need to just get what you came for and move on.

A word of caution: these tricks and strategies don't always work. With some practice, you will develop a sense of uneasiness if you get through all these steps and feel like you haven't actually understood a book or that you might have missed something important. Trust your instincts. Also, some authors don't do any of the things that these strategies assume that they do - I have assumed that authors (and their editors and publishers) operate with a certain order, organize information in a certain way, and present arguments at least linearly (if not packaged up and tied with a bow that is the chapter heading). Some authors, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, may not have any commitment to such Western order and organization. As a thought experiment, Google the Dewey Decimal system for libraries and try to invent for yourself three books that would be difficult to assign a Dewey number to. I see no reason why an author for whom trees have souls or Western medicine is built on a false premise should be easy to categorize as "life science".

Just trust yourself and your instincts about a text. Many you will be able to check off in an hour. Some in an afternoon. Others, you will choose to read every word. The rule is simple: Read only as much as you need, and never any less ;)