In the Preface to *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (1996), Robert Alter discusses the purpose and thrust of his book. According to Alter, “Identity politics has become increasingly vehement…in many instances making the earlier emphasis on the theory seem like a mandarin luxury” (1996); Alter rallies against the politicization of literature because it sells short theory’s loam of accumulated dialogue about literature, and makes talk about theoretical schema seem maudlin or outdated. Alter is not necessarily an opponent of the politicization of literature, but he feels that several years of “nearly exclusive emphasis” on politics (identity and ethnicity) has “painfully diminished” the “wealth and sheer variety of insight, experience, and enjoyment that literature can provide” (Alter, 1996). In other words, readers should always digest the literature before they are able to construct an opinion about it.

Alter argues for turning back the page (literally) to a time when the text (right there on the page) was the preeminent criteria for liking or disliking a work of literature. In the Introduction to *The Pleasures of Reading*… (1996), “The Disappearance of Reading,” Alter writes, “I strongly suspect that many young people now earning undergraduate degrees in English or French at our most prestigious institutions have read two or three pages of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva for every page of George Eliot or Stendhal” (Alter, 1996, pg. 11). Alter’s critique of coffee-house theorists, and their minions, seems only fair: don’t interpret a book until you have actually ingested its words. It seems only right that one shouldn’t write a critique of the *Concorde* if they have never flown in one; in this way, Alter is simply arguing for engagement with the thing to precede cognition and taxonomy of the thing.
Alter advocates for people to read more literature and less theory about the literature they read as the first step towards wrestling with literature. Reading literature has the capacity to “sharpen our perception and heighten our pleasure as readers” (Alter, 1996, pg. 19); it has the ability to disseminate the entertainment of reading as a “lively experience, a source of complex pleasure and insight” (Alter, 1996, pg. 22). Specifically, Alter’s book is about “the language of literature and how it provides rich pleasure for readers” (Alter, 1996, pg. 20), and emanates from Alter’s conviction that “all study of literature must emerge from and return to reading” (Alter, 1996, pg. 21).

Writers on Writing: collected essays from the New York Times (2001) with an introduction by John Darton houses a collection of essays penned by successful writers that focus on the physical act of writing. The essays collected represent all genres and cover the spectrum of contemporary writers: from André Aciman to Elie Wiesel. More importantly, Writers of Writing (2001), offers heaps of practical, hard-scrabble advice to burgeoning authors, like this sage tidbit from Alice Hoffman, “Writers don’t choose their craft; they need to write in order to face the world” (2001, pg. 97) or this haunting scrap from Roxana Robinson, “I write about things that trouble me. I write about the things that disturb me, the things that won’t let me alone” (2001, pg. 193). There are some striking similarities between the two texts, and some disparities; but, given half a chance, Alter and Darnton might agree that the most important aspect to consider when discussing literature would have to be the text itself. There are myriad points of intersection between these two books; the most striking similarities happen to center around Alter’s discussion
For example, Alter says of structure in literature that it is a “misleading but necessary metaphor for describing the formal organization of the work as a whole” (1996, pg. 142). Speaking of structure in literature is misleading because “structure suggests spatial extension and stasis” (1996, pg 142); however, literature is a messy endeavor that uses the chaos of creation to forge a discernable pattern. In addition, some authors might choose to reconstruct a story or episode that transpired chronologically by starting with the end and ending with the beginning. Furthermore, Alter writes, “a good deal goes on in the mind of the writer below or beyond the level of conscious awareness, and so structure, too, may be the product of intuitive elaboration” (1996, pg. 142).

So, if literature is mostly an intuitive production, then the guidance offered by Darnton’s book might be overshadowed by the difficulty of forecasting or divining structure in literature. Almost as if he were coming to Darnton’s defense, Alter writes

Because all literature is artifice, exploiting the artifice of design is bound to appeal to a vast variety of writers with different aims and sensibilities working in different genres, and even where there is little conscious exploitation, the momentum of mnemonic forces intrinsic to literary imagination often produces coherent design. (1996, pg. 169).

Darnton’s impetus for collecting and editing his book is simple yet sincere, “I thought, wouldn’t it be interesting to commission a series of writers to let them talk about their craft…Or about reading—say, the general consensus that we are sinking into the abyss of an alliterate society” (2001, pg. xiii). Darnton’s concerns about the U.S. turning into an alliterate society are not a ploy to sell more books (especially his); they are a part of a
general wail that have been lobbed by lectors, academics, and intellectuals for some time now.

In 2002, the National Endowment for the Arts requested that the Census Bureau conduct a survey on the propensity for the typical American to engage with literature. In 2004, the NEA released the survey, “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America”. It polled more than “17,000 adults” and asked them “if, during the previous twelve months, they had read any novels, short stories, plays, or poetry in their leisure time (not for work or school)” (2004, pg. 4). The findings alarmed the American zeitgeist in schools and institutes, as well as the publishers of literature in the U.S. whom were most likely monitoring for signs of future trends in book buying. Publishers were more than alarmed, and they should have been because, like it or not, they were going to have to deal with the fact that,

In 1990, book buying constituted 5.7 percent of total recreation spending, while spending on audio, video, computers, and software was 6 percent. By 2002, electronic spending had soared to 24 percent, while spending on books declined slightly to 5.6 percent. (2004, pg. 7)

Dana Gioia, the chairman of the NEA at the time, said the report was not one the NEA was “happy to issue” because, in effect, it heralded the disturbing notion that, “For the first time in modern history, less than half the adult population now reads literature” (2004, pg. 2). Most alarming was the report’s finding that “Less than half of the adult American population now reads literature” (2004, pg.4). There are many reasons that the survey’s results are disturbing. In an N.Y. Times Opinion piece concerning the NEA’s survey, Andrew Solomon, a regular correspondent, writes that “Without books, we cannot succeed in our current struggle against absolutism and terrorism. The retreat from
civic to engaged democracy, from the principles that we say we want to share with the rest of the world” (Solomon, 2004, par. 7). Indeed, a lower engagement with literature not only affects comprehension levels, it lowers engagement with ancillary cultural institutes (like museums and libraries) that reinforce and are reinforced by reading. In other words,

Literary readers are more likely than non-literary readers to perform volunteer and charity work, visit art museums, attend performing arts events, and attend sporting events. (2004, pg. 7)
References


It is a reading comprehension strategy where the reader constantly enquires whether the text makes any sense to them and enforcing strategic methods to make the text easier. You can understand it better by using these few methods: Re-read the paragraph. It is a method that stimulates the readers to create a vague image in their mind, about the content they read. It’s like a person making movies or videos in their minds out of the prior knowledge, imagination and the content of the text. This will stimulate your imagination and enhance your involvement with the text and thus improve your mental imagery. Develop reading for pleasure. Chn see teachers and peers as readers. Chn understand what being a good reader means. Differentiate as you would in any lesson. Reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child’s future success. What does whole-class reading look like?

Suggested structure: x3 sessions p/w 1. Immersion, modelled reading, shared reading 2. Oral responses 3. Written responses

Alternatives: Teach, practise, apply. Revision of skills application to different texts. Comparison of texts. Providing different modes e.g. picture, song, extract see. Comprehension requires the reader to be an active constructor of meaning. Reading research has demonstrated that readers do not simply "perceive" the meaning that is IN a text. In fact, expert readers co-construct meaning WITH a text. There is wide agreement among reading researchers that every time a reader reads anything, they make use of the following strategies: Activate prior knowledge, and connect the applicable prior experiences to the reading (if students don’t have the requisite background knowledge about a topic, they will be unable to comprehend). Help readers of all ages develop a deep understanding of the texts that they read with these strategies, ideas, and instructional guidelines. Grade s. PreK-12.