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I think one thing that's very important. If you are a person who is studying at home and you have a whole range of books which you're supposed to be reading, it's a good idea to stick at the most difficult of those books. There's a tendency for us to read books which almost flatter us, which tell us things that we half already knew, which almost comfort us. I mean Roland Barthes, the great French, what was he, so many things, let's call him a semiologist, let's call him a sociologist, let's call him a literary figure, whatever. The great Roland Barthes distinguished between two sorts of reading.

One was called readerly and one was called writerly. And readerly texts were those rather like say James Bond novels, where you pretty well knew what was going to happen, you knew the hero was going to meet a girl, the girl was going to turn out to be really on the villain's side, but then da-da-da. As you read them there's a nice sense of I now where I'm going, this is all nice and predictable, this is all very friendly, I don't have to make any work. Then he said there's a writerly text.

Now the writerly texts are those where it's difficult. You're not quite certain what they're getting at, what do they mean by that, where's that going, what's happened to this character, why have we suddenly changed periods, what's happened to the time dimension, did we meet them before, what's this argument about? This is, Barthes says, this is very boring. He says, because when you're encountering that writing, you are engaged with the text, you're wrestling with the text, you're fighting it rather than allowing it to reproduce your conventional thoughts and ideas.

So if you have a range of books in front of you, and you're wondering which one to start on, I would suggest you start on the one that you have to battle with, that you have to fight with, because at the end of the fight, you might have done something to change your ideas, rather than those readerly books which do nothing else but reinforce ideas you already have.