

## How does the Rambler Rating System Work!?

For a detailed video explanation for how and why we use our rating system, check it out here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfdkJeYXQfA&t=77s> Otherwise, here is a summarized explanation of the 2 things that make up the Rambler Rating System: **1)** Our 5 star scale and **2)** The 6 Categories we Rate. (There is also a section on how we rate non-fiction books below.)

### 5 Star Scale

In 2 To Ramble book reviews, we rate on a 1-5 Star Scale, to the nearest .25 stars. Each rating is associated with a word that describes our feelings which is broken down below!

<b>Star:</b>	<b>Associated Word:</b>
1	Awful
1.25	Very Bad
1.5	Bad
1.75	Very Flawed
2	Flawed
2.25	Very Disappointing
2.5	Disappointing
2.75	Somewhat Disappointing
3	Neutral
3.25	Somewhat Good
3.5	Good
3.75	Really Good
4	Great
4.25	Really Great
4.5	Spectacular

4.75	Nearly Floored
5	Floored
N/A	The book wasn't going for this category & therefore has no rating

*Note: To use the full 5 star scale, 5 does NOT mean perfect & 1 does NOT mean the worst thing ever. We also use the word 'bad' at 1.5 and 'good' at 3.5 (rather than 'bad' being at 2.5) in order to use the full scale. Not many books are 'bad' but many are 'flawed/disappointing' and we also think it's a distinction without a difference to rate anything below 'awful' and anything above 'floored' (even though there are worse things than 'awful' and better things than 'floored' out there). Our hope is that there is a wide distribution of scores when you rate using our system. Also, feel free to use N/A when a book simply isn't going for one of these categories.*

## Category Breakdown

You will see 7 total scores in our reviews. 1 overall score (our Rambler Rating), and 6 individually scored categories which break down every important aspect of a book that helps us explain and discuss our overall rating for the book. Our total score (Rambler Rating) is not an average of the 6 categories; rather, it is a separate score that we feel the book deserves because a book can focus on some aspects while neglecting others and still be fantastic (or not so fantastic). A book can be better or worse than the sum of its parts.

Each of the following underlined words/phrases are categories that we rate on the 1-5 scale. Below is an explanation of what they mean, along with what makes something a 5 Star Read VS a 1 Star Read.

**Rambler Rating:** This is our overall rating of the book, and the 6 categories below help explain why we give a book a certain score.

1. **Emotional Impact:** This category looks at how much the book's intended emotion hit you. Was the book trying to make you laugh, cry, cheer, horrified, tense, etc, and did it have that impact on you?
  - a. 5/5 star Emotional Impact: Intended Outburst (you cried/laughed/cheered/edge of your seat).

- b. 1/5 star Emotional Impact: Opposite of Intended Outburst (Book tried to make you laugh or cheer/etc, but instead you cringed)
  - c. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Intended VS Opposite Outburst*.
  - d. *Note: Some people have different reactions and are less emotive, so have your 5 star vs 1 star be internally consistent with however you best express your emotional highs and lows.*
2. **Thought-Provoking**: This category explores the messages, themes, and ideas of a book. Anything and everything to do with what the book is trying to say ranging from what makes a human to what makes a good friend. Two factors are most important: *the execution and the message itself*. For superb execution, look into how all of the elements in the story (the plot/characters/world/etc) are interwoven to help magnify the themes of the book. Does it all resonate that these elements must be a part of *this* story to get across its themes? For the message itself, is it something you agree with? If you disagree, does it still make a strong case? Is it challenging?

Also, keep in mind the intended audience. A 'simple' theme in a book intended for children or young adults can be just as thought-provoking as a 'complex' theme for more mature audiences. The execution, depth, and impact of that simple vs. complex theme is most important.

Basically, it all comes down to this: Does the book stick with you/make you reflect positively not because of the emotions it made you feel, but because of the themes/messages/ideas it explored? Is this book your new example for how to execute \_\_\_\_\_ theme profoundly? (Remember: All these categories can be rated N/A if the book clearly isn't going for something.)

- a. 5/5 star Thought-Provoking: Lifelong impact. A theme/message/idea that was executed profoundly. It either changed your mind, reinforced something you believed, or made you look at something from a new perspective in a convincing way (whether you agree or disagree).
  - b. 1/5 star Thought-Provoking: Insulting your intelligence. The theme/message is executed horribly and/or is an unconvincing message you disagree with.
  - c. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Lifelong impact VS Insulting*.
3. **Characters**: This category judges characters. Whether they're static or dynamic, main or secondary, this category judges how real the characters feel. Characters

could have flaws/wants/needs or could just be a one-note side character that perfectly fits their role. This category judges how actualized the characters are.

- a. 5/5 star Characters: Irreplaceable characters that feel like real people. You can't put another character from another book in their place.
  - b. 3/5 star Characters: Replaceable characters, but they are coherent.
  - c. 1/5 star Characters: Incoherent characters that aren't just replaceable, but they are inconsistent and don't make sense.
  - d. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Irreplaceable VS Incoherent*.
4. **Plot**: This category reviews the plot of the novel. The promise, progress, and payoff of a story. Consider the structure of the book (three acts?), the pacing, and series of events that occur. Plot holes, plot armor, and everything in between. Basically, would you add, subtract, or change anything to the plot of the novel? Consider the complexity of the plot, too. Simple plots and complex plots can both be 5 stars, but be harsher on the simpler plots.
- a. 5/5 star Plot: You'd like to see very few additions, subtractions, or changes in the plot. If the plot is a lot simpler, be slightly more critical on what could be added/subtracted, or changed. Be slightly more lenient on extremely complex plots.
  - b. 1/5 star Plot: You'd like to see a TON of additions, subtractions, or changes in the plot. It would be almost an entirely different book.
  - c. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Very few VS Tons of add/sub/changes*.
5. **Worldbuilding**: Worldbuilding analyzes all the elements of the world/magic system (if applicable) and how much suspension of disbelief you have in the book. Whether it was the atmosphere, history, cultures, geography, flora, fauna, magic, setting, governments, religions, curse words, linguistics, fashion, etc... did the world allow you to escape? Does it feel real?
- a. 5/5 Worldbuilding: The book made you forget reality. It sucked you in. Whether it was one specific element or a whole factor of elements, when you read this book you truly escaped.
  - b. 1/5 Worldbuilding: There was no immersion. You kept finding inconsistencies, and/or just were not convinced this place was real.
  - c. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Forget reality VS No immersion*.

6. **Prose:** Prose is a tough category to judge because different authors have such different styles. It is generally good to have an economy of words, do multiple things at once with your sentences, not be redundant, not repeat yourself, and allow the reader to actually visualize what is in the author's head. Some of the best authors in the world constantly break these 'rules/conventions' of writing because they deeply understand the rules and intentionally break them, but on a baseline, the most important thing is to convey to the reader what is happening in the story. There are many ways to do this and therefore many ways to judge prose, but a simple way we break it down is this – is an author's prose so good that others try to emulate their style? Do other professionals and amateur writers attempt to do what they did? Does the author have a unique 'voice' that allows you to go – “Oh yea, that's a \_\_\_\_\_ book.”

Similar to filmmaking, you can tell certain directors have their unique 'style' (A Tarantino film, a Christopher Nolan film, etc). The best prose for an author is when they have a unique voice that connects with readers, and others in the industry or aspiring to be in the industry try to emulate (or you believe others should try to emulate).

- a. 5/5 Prose: Irreplicable prose that makes this author special/have their own voice. (Note: So long as their style and writing is actually 'good' – which, again, looks at how clear the language is and many factors that go into readability and overall expertise). Is it both expertly done and the prose feels like *this* author.
- b. 1/5 Prose: Distracting prose that is difficult to read/follow along.
- c. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Irreplicable VS Distracting*.
- d. Note: Books in a foreign language that are translated into your primary tongue are more difficult to judge because of what is lost in translation. For those books, either put *N/A* because you cannot be a good judge of that, or clarify that you are only judging the translated prose.

### Now for a Rating Example:

\*This is my (Austin) actual rating for this book

“A Fire Upon the Deep” by Vernor Vinge:

Emotional Impact - 4.25 ★  
Thought-Provoking - 5 ★  
Characters - 3 ★  
Plot - 4.5 ★  
Worldbuilding - 5 ★

Prose - 4.5 ★

Rambler Rating - 5 ★

## What About Non-fiction?

With non-fiction, many of the above categories may not apply. With a biography, self-help, philosophical, or a history book – these are not fictional worlds where we are rating an author’s ability to create something from nothing. When it comes to non-fiction, rate the categories as follows. The only category that inherently changes is *Plot*.

**Note:** Some books should be completely N/A (not rated at all). Ask yourself, “What was the purpose of this book? Did the author even intend to publish this for readers?” This mainly applies to historical and religious texts. Examples include:

- *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius
  - Although thoughtful and inspirational to many, this ‘book’ wasn’t meant to be published by the author. It was the musings and introspection of a man writing to himself, not a narrative written for anyone else. This is a historical text more akin to an artifact. Feel free to criticize all you want (the stoic might object to this), but our category system is moot for these kinds of works. In order to judge something with our scale, the intent of the author to be read and judged in the first place matters so that we know what framework to judge appropriately. Otherwise, this is just a historical piece and should be analyzed as such. Many books can be both a historical piece and also judged with our scale (many Ancient Greek, Chinese, etc, philosophers’ books) because those pieces had that intent to be read and open to criticism in the first place.
- *The Diary of Anne Frank*
  - For similar reasons as *Meditations*, this was only meant for the author. This is a historical document, a diary. Of course you can have opinions on any text, but, like we said, our rating system is useless for works like *Meditations* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Intent matters. Imagine using our scale to rate a letter from Napoleon to his wife. Or a receipt at Costco’s. The original intent of a work to be published and read publicly for criticism is what this comes down to. Basically: Did the author know going in that they were writing a narrative they wanted to publish?
- *The Bible, Quran, Torah, Bhagavad Gita, etc.*
  - These are all texts that were written/inspired by believers’ God(s), prophet(s), etc, according to the respective religion. Their purpose is to say what is objectively true. People won’t agree on the genre –

nonbelievers will say it's fiction, believers will say it's nonfiction. Of course they will be analyzed, criticized, admired, etc. For our 6 category scale's purposes, religious texts have a very different intent than all other genre/sub-genre of books.

TL;DR: You are free to criticize and review anything, but our scale isn't as useful for certain kinds of analysis. It is useful for works that were intended to be read a certain way. That is 1) The book was meant to be, by the author, wide-scale published and read in the first place and 2) The book is not claimed to have been written or inspired by God.

With that aside, here's how we rate nonfiction:

1. **Emotional Impact:** Rate this category when appropriate using the same "fiction" framework as above. Sometimes stories based on true events are meant to make you cry/etc. If the book is going for an emotional gutpunch, rate it. If not, write *N/A*. Often, this category will be blank.
2. **Thought-Provoking:** This category also works similar to the "fiction" framework as above. (*Lifelong impact vs. insulting*). Fiction focuses on themes and messages told through a make-believe narrative. For nonfiction, the message and theme should be based in reality. With a thought-provoking nonfiction book, ask yourself this: Is the information credible? Accurate? Convincing? Educational? Did the history book teach you something that will stick with you forever? Did the philosophy book change your perspective, or double down on a perspective you already had and this book will be used as your source? Did the cookbook teach you a method of cooking that blew your mind? Use this category to portray how well the book gave you credible and mind-blowing perspective/facts. 1 star *thought-provoking* books will insult your intelligence and/or are not based in reality.
3. **Characters:** Rate this category using the framework above as well. If the book is focused on a historical figure (biography, history book, etc) – rate this if they portray that character in an *irreplaceable* way. What history book gives the best representation of Napoleon? What biography gives you the most profound insight into who Einstein was as a person?
4. **Presentation:** This is the category that changes slightly. Instead of rating the *Plot* of a non-fiction book, this category should be treated as **Presentation**. How was the book structured, packaged, and delivered? Was it clear and engaging? Like with *Plot*, especially consider how complex the information was. Did the author

help explain a high-level concept in a comprehensible way? Did the book repeat itself? Not focus enough on a point?

- e. 5/5 star Presentation: The author gave you complex information in an extremely engaging way that was easy to comprehend. Be slightly harsher on simpler concepts/ideas and slightly more lenient on complex ones.
  - f. 1/5 star Presentation: You were very bored with the structure and confused by the information. It wasn't packaged or delivered well.
  - g. A brief way of thinking about this category: *Very Engaged VS Very Unengaged*.
5. **Worldbuilding**: If the book is attempting to transport you to another time period, rate this category with the framework above. A lot of nonfiction that "worldbuild" will be focused on setting/location as well. How well did the history book bring you to Ancient Egypt? How well was the cafe described in the contemporary novel?
6. **Prose**: Rate this category using the framework above as well!

Note: I've found that the *Thought-provoking* and *Presentation* ratings are the most important for a lot of nonfiction. Basically, was the information educational and presented in an engaging way?

### Now for a Rating Example:

\*This is my (Austin) actual rating for this book

"The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt:

Emotional Impact - N/A

Thought-Provoking - 4.25 ★

Characters - N/A

Presentation - 3 ★

Worldbuilding - N/A

Prose - 3 ★

Rambler Rating - 4 ★