# book lust
## READERS' ADVISORY

### Introduction

Traditionally, Readers' Advisory has focused on helping readers find books in a specific genre - such as science fiction, romance, fantasy or horror. In the 1990s, a handful of pioneering librarians introduced appeal factors as a way to further define the characteristics of books that readers enjoy.

NoveList, a popular reading recommendation database, provides users with five appeal factors categories for fiction - character, storyline, pace, tone, and writing style. Within these appeal factors, Novelist provides 133 appeal factors. By combining genre and appeal, you might help a reader find a fast-paced mystery with relatable characters, or an intricately plotted, dialect-filled fantasy novel.

This approach may work well for many readers, but librarian and booklover Nancy Pearl has developed a unique framework for Readers' Advisory that focuses on just four appeal factors.

### Nancy Pearl

Nancy Pearl is a librarian, book lover, bestselling author, and frequent guest on NPR. She believes that a librarian's core role is to broaden and deepen people's engagement with the world of literature. Pearl asserts that "reading is about experiencing joy, and that we learn something about ourselves, and the world, with every book we read . . ." (Pearl, 2012).

By narrowing the appeal factors down to just four, which she calls the Four Doorways, we can help readers to find new books outside of their regular reading habits and give them a broader range of books to consider.

### The Doorways: How We Experience a Book

The four doorways are the experiential elements through which a reader connects with or experiences a book. When readers ask for a good book to read "what we really want is to recreate that pleasurable *experience*" (Pearl, 2012).

Pearl's doorways include Story, Character, Setting and Language. The analogy of a doorway is used because readers can imagine a doorway as the entrance into a book. The larger the doorway, the easier it is to access that aspect of the book. (Some readers envision how wide the door is open as an alternative to the size of the doorway.) All adult fiction and narrative nonfiction books contain each of the doorways, but rarely are the doorways equal in a book. Usually, one or two of the doorways are larger than the others.

# The Doorways Defined



## Story

Books with a large Story Doorway have a lot of action moving the plot forward and are difficult to put down. Readers want to know what happens next, and might even stay up all night to finish. When readers describe these books they will talk about the events of the book.

Story Doorway attribute: This is the most popular doorway, and bestsellers are often found in this category.

When describing these books, readers will talk about what happens in the story, and will use language like:

- Fast-paced
- Can't put it down
- Page turner
- Adventure
- Edge of my seat
- Nail Biter
- Engrossing
- All nighter
- Epic (for a long book)

- Gripping
- Strong plot
- Quick read
- Action packed
- Thrilling
- Spellbinding
- Adrenaline fueled
- Tumultuous
- Sweeping

Popular authors who write with a large story doorway include:

- Dan Brown
- Agatha Christie
- Michael Crichton
- Gillian Flynn
- Tess Gerritsen
- John Grisham
- J. A. Jance

- Stephen King
- Jean Hanff Korelitz
- Robert Ludlum
- Debbie Macomber
- Jodi Picoult
- Nora Roberts
- R. A. Salvatore

## Character

Books with a large Character Doorway are full of interesting and three-dimensional people. The characters in these books drive the plot. Readers describe these books by talking about characters who "jump off the page" or mention relationships between characters.

Character Doorway attribute: Books with character names in their title usually have large Character Doorways.

When describing these books, readers will use language like:

- Growth
- Coming of age
- Connection
- Friendship
- Betrayal
- Family
- Interpersonal dynamics
- Internal
- Fleshed-out
- Fully realized

- Three dimensional
- Believable
- Well rounded
- Quirky
- Compelling
- Engaging
- Emotional
- Romantic
- First person narrative
- Introspective

Popular authors that write with a large Character Doorway include:

- Maya Angelou
- Jane Austen
- Harper Lee
- Hilary Mantel
- Frank McCourt

- Toni Morrison
- Rainbow Rowell
- John Steinbeck
- Amy Tan
- Anne Tyler

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## Setting

Books with a large Setting Doorway give readers a sense of being there, when or wherever that might be. In books with a large Setting Doorway, "the setting is essential to understanding character, conflict, or theme" (Pearl, 1999). These are worldbuilding books, and have settings that feel familiar or that entice the reader to visit that place.

Setting Doorway attribute: This doorway is common in historical fiction, westerns, science fiction, and fantasy books.

When describing these books, readers will use language like:

- Atmospheric
- Brings to life
- Vivid
- Reveals
- Sensory
- Animates
- Imaginative
- Evocative

- Surreal
- Historical
- Place name or time
- Functions like another character
- Felt like you were there
- Immersed
- Lost
- Foreign yet familiar

Popular authors that write with a large Setting Doorway include:

- Philippa Ballantine
- Marion Zimmer Bradley
- Sarah Dunant
- Ivan Doig
- Alan Dean Foster
- Terry Goodkind
- David Guterson
- Frank Herbert

- P. D. James
- Robert Jordan
- Guy Gavriel Kay
- Anne McCaffrey
- Edward Rutherfurd
- Amor Towles
- David Weber
- Margaret Weis

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## Language

This doorway is hardest to define, but luckily these readers often self-identify. Books with a large Language Doorway pull readers in with their beautiful, poetic or original writing. Readers who enjoy these books want to marvel at *how* the author uses language; not at *what* is being said.

Language Doorway attribute: Many award winning books have large Language Doorways.

When describing these books, readers will use language like:

- Lush
- Descriptive
- Articulate
- Poetic
- Elegant tone
- Authentic
- Unique
- Regional
- Challenging
- Idiosyncratic
- Original
- Fresh
- Well written

- Lyrical
- Expansive
- Dense
- Snarky
- Distinct voice
- Leisurely
- Metaphor
- Allusion
- Irreverent
- Witty
- Literary
- Ironic
- Quirky

Popular authors that write with a large story doorway include:

- Michael Chabon
- Don DeLillo
- Jeffrey Eugenides
- William Faulkner
- Jonathan Franzen
- Ernest Hemingway
- Jhumpa Lahiri

- Jonathan Lethem
- Gabriel García Márquez
- Cormac McCarthy
- David Mitchell
- Haruki Murakami
- Kurt Vonnegut
- David Foster Wallace

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# The Four Doorways & Readers' Advisory practices

The goal of Readers' Advisory is to connect readers with books that they enjoy. Nancy Pearl's Four Doorways can be applied to any Readers' Advisory practice conducted in libraries.

## Readers' Advisory Interviews

The first step of a successful Readers' Advisory interview is to learn about a patron's reading interests and habits. A great way to start the Readers' Advisory interview is to ask a patron to describe a book they have enjoyed. We suggest that you ask, "Tell me about a book you liked" to get them started, instead of asking them to tell you what the book is *about*. This is because the aspects of the book that drew the reader in may have nothing to do with what the book is about.

Listen to the language the reader uses as they describe a book they enjoyed. Pay attention to words they use - they can tell you what the reader valued in the book they are describing, and can help you identify the appeal factors, or doorways, they read for.

Does the reader describe what happened in the book, with details about the plot or its pacing? Sounds like they read for the Story Doorway. Do they talk about the people in the book and their relationships? They are likely fans of books with large Character Doorways. If they talk about the time and place in which the book is set, they might like books with a large Setting Doorway. If they struggle to identify what happened in the book, but talk about the way it was written, you can safely steer them to books with a large Language Doorway.

Using the book and author lists, provide a few suggestions to the reader and solicit their feedback. Remember that a successful Readers' Advisory interview will result in a happy patron!

Pearl, N., Knappe, Martha, & Higashi, Chris. (1999). *Now read this : A guide to mainstream fiction, 1978-1998*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited.

Pearl, N. (2012). Check it out: With Nancy Pearl.(Libraries)(Interview). Publishers Weekly, 259(12), 18.

Nancy Pearl. (2012) Reading with Purpose. TEDx Talk

Nancy talking about RA and social media:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_HqripedZo&list=PLkVFXGviIFRB6w9rsRu-eTP9BYcqh35Qb

Nancy talking about much of what we talked about in class:
http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/columns-and-blogs/nancy-pearl/article/51109-check-it-out-with-nancy-pearl-finding-that-next-good-book.html

Nancy's book reviews on KUOW
http://www.npr.org/podcasts/381444796/k-u-o-w-s-nancy-pearl-book-reviews