

What are the Best Project Management Books?

Yes, we've had a huge revolution in how we can learn and teach ourselves. And you may be **ready for a project management course**. But, for a new project manager, project management books are still a great way to learn. And for those of us with experience under our belts, the right project management books can offer new insights and ideas.

So, what project management books would I recommend to a new project manager?

That's the question I have set out to answer in this article. Any selection of the best project management books must be subjective and this is no different. But in this revised version of an old article, I have tried to make it as useful as possible, by dividing it into four sections:

1. Easy to read introductory project management books
2. Next step project management books for PMs with a little experience under your belt
3. Next step books on specific project management disciplines
4. More demanding reads, with a higher technical content

So, with this explanation, but with no apology for the subjective selections, here are my recommendations. Please add your own to the comments section below.

Part 1: Easy to Read Introductory Project Management Books

Let's say you are a real beginner. You've been tasked with a project and have no formal project management training. You may have no experience either. But perhaps more likely, you've delivered small personal projects before... and maybe even some small organizational projects.

What project management books will give you a straightforward, easy to follow, intro to doing your first structured project?

Here, I am looking for:

- Easy to read – the author must be a confident and effective communicator
- Simple but authoritative – the author's project process must be straightforward, but be rooted in strong best practice
- Clearly structured – the book needs to follow a solid structure, making it easy for the reader to get repeatable results

The result is five project management books.

And this time, I am not going to be coy. I wrote my own introductory book to meet the three criteria above, so I shall start with that one.

How to Manage a Great Project: On budget. On target. On time. **Mike Clayton**

Of all my project management books, this is the fundamental one. I designed it to take a beginner to a good level of competence, in eight easy steps.

So instead of telling you what I think, here is what Anne-Marie O'Hara, Head of Projects at The National Trust for Scotland, said:

'Read this book, follow his advice and you will succeed.'

What You Need to Know about Project Management **Fergus O'Connell**

In my opinion, this is the next best of the lightweight mass market trade paperbacks about project management. It has all the basics written clearly in bite sized chunks.

Rather than follow a project lifecycle approach (like How to Manage a Great Project), this project management book focuses on the key skills you need to focus on, to deliver a successful project.

Project Management For Dummies **Stanley E Portney**

I'll admit it... For years, I held out against Dummies books for, well, snobbish reasons. I'm not a Dummy. But this book, like its modern stable mates, does not treat you like a dummy.

Quite simply, it's very good.

Project Management for You: How to Turn Your Ideas Into Reality, Deliver On Your Promises, and Get Things Done **Cesar Abeid**

I don't usually like nor recommend self-published, Kindle-only books. But I will make an exception for this well-written ebook.

It is written in a personal, first person style that you may or may not like, but it is full of good pragmatic advice, clearly explained.

20:20 Project Management: How to Deliver on Time, on Budget and on Spec **Tony Marks**

This is a project management book that was recommended by Online**PM**Courses reader, Angus Duncan in his comment to the previous version of this article. I have taken a look at this book, though not thoroughly. And I was impressed.

It takes a similar, lifecycle approach to How to Manage a Great Project. It is written for a slightly more experienced reader, but I think it still fits with this group, rather than the next.

Part 2: Next-step Project Management Books for PMs with a Little Experience under Your Belt

The first set of books is great for beginners. And they also offer plenty to learn for those readers who have done a few projects and want to refresh their learning and spot areas where you can brush up.

But what if you want to go further?

You have a few projects under your belt. So, now you want to stretch your thinking and improve your project management practice. What are the next-step project management books to speed you on your way to mastery of your craft?

My criteria for these books are:

- The author is eminent and clearly writes from a standpoint of their own mastery
- The book will make you think – it has ideas that take you beyond our Part 1 project management books
- Yet the author still writes in a clear and compelling way, without hiding behind jargon and unnecessary complexity.

Performance-Based Project Management: Increasing the Probability of Project Success

Glen B Alleman

Glen Alleman really knows his stuff, so this is rigorous, reliable, yet completely straightforward. This represents the distillation into simple ideas of a vast wealth of experience delivering high value, high criticality projects – often in software systems. As soon as I knew Glen was writing a book, I was confident it would rank highly among my best project management books.

Glen is also a frequent project management blogger and has contributed an excellent article on [Capabilities Based Planning](#) to OnlinePMCourses.

Alpha Project Managers

Andy Crowe

This book blew me away.

Andy Crowe has created a thorough survey and deftly extracted large amounts of gold from the data he's mined. I learnt so much from it that [I wrote a comprehensive review of the book for an earlier article](#). Please do take a look at that.

Then buy and read this book.

Herding Chickens. Innovative Techniques for Project Management

Dan Bradbary and David Garrett

Glen Alleman's blog is called 'Herding Cats'. Here is a similar metaphor for the challenges of project management. The book's principal author, Dan Bradbary, has clearly been around the block a few times (he's a PMP with 30 years' experience when he wrote the book).

So Herding Chickens tackles some of the thorny challenges project managers face day-to-day. And he offers a range of valuable insights drawing on a wide range of ideas and models. His is an approach very similar to mine: read widely, learn from anything, draw it into your practice to test it out, then pass it on if it works.

Making Sense of Project Realities

Charles Smith

Here's another book that will give you insights and ideas for dealing with the day-to-day practicalities of leading a project.

The book's style is to create mini case studies and then discuss options and solutions. It's a thoughtful book that sometimes strays into a philosophical mode. The main challenge is that it is a hardback that's out of print, making it expensive to source in book form. But what is inexcusable is the outrageous price Gower charge for the Kindle edition. Order it from your local library, or find a second-hand copy at a good price. It is not worth the \$100 or so you'd pay for the Kindle version.

Project Management Coaching Workbook: Six Steps to Unleashing Your Potential

Susanne Madsen

If you want to self-coach, to become a better PM, and are prepared to put in the work of doing her exercises, Susanne offers a great book. It is one of those project management books you are likely to return to at different stages of your career. She comes from a business project background.

Brilliant Project Leader: What the Best Project Leaders Know, DO, and Say to Get Results, Evert Time

Mike Clayton

Declaration: this is another one of mine.

This book has three parts. The first looks at the four essentials of team leadership in a project context, and offers a wealth of tools and tips for each. Part 2 sets out the things you need to do to move from project manager to project leader, in each of the four primary project stages. And finally, the last part offers tips and tools for a project leader who needs to deal with tough times – which you will do one day.

Part 3: Next-step Books on Specific Project Management Disciplines

In this part, let's look at some of the specific topics you'll want to study, as you develop your project management career. Here, I'm looking for pretty much the same things as I was in Part 2.

Risk Happens! Managing Risk and Avoiding Failure in Business Projects **Mike Clayton**

This is another of my own books, but I firmly believe it is the best introductory level project risk management book out there.

It's written for early-stage project managers who want to go beyond the hour or so of coverage the subject got in their project management training. And it is stuffed full of tables, tools, and diagrams to make a tricky subject easy to understand and practical to implement.

Effective Risk Management: Some Keys to Success **Edmund H Conrow**

Here's a book with one of the most self-effacing subtitles: 'some keys to success'. It hides the fact that this is the book you go to when you want an authoritative guide to project risk management... and you are prepared to put the work in.

This is not an easy book. But it is well written and, if you are a serious PM who needs to manage risk rigorously on major projects, it's the book for you.

Identifying and Managing Project Risk **Tom Kendrick**

This is the intermediate volume between Risk Happens! and Effective Risk Management. It's a big read with more detail than the former. But it is far less rigorous and technical than the latter.

I love Kendrick's telling of the story of the Panama Canal, as the end piece to each chapter.

The Influence Agenda: A Systematic Approach to Aligning Stakeholders in Times of Change **Mike Clayton**

This is the fourth (and last) of my own project management books that I am listing. And I think it's the best.

It is a comprehensive guide to project stakeholder engagement. It avoids proprietary models and cover a huge range of ideas: from stakeholder analysis techniques to persuasive writing, to behavioral economics, to stakeholder campaign management. This is a topic with a paucity of decent books, so this one fills a big gap. It will also give you a three page history of the concept of a stakeholder!

The Project Manager's Guide to Mastering Agile: Principles and Practices for an Adaptive Approach **Charles (Chuck) Cobb**

Chuck Cobb is a good friend of Online**PM**Courses, and if you want to learn **Agile Project Management**, then **we recommend his courses**.

But we choose our friends carefully. Chuck knows his stuff and has a highly pragmatic approach to Agile, which allows you to adopt it at any level from the local to the enterprise, and in any degree of rigor, from pure Scrum through to an adaptive blend of methodologies.

Agile Project Management for Dummies **Mark C Layton and Steven J Ostermiller**

This is not the book if you want a rigorous text on applying Agile to your projects. But, if you want an easy-to-read introduction that will leave you feeling fully familiar with the principles and practices of Agile, it's a great book.

Managing successful projects with PRINCE2 **Nigel Bennett**

There are lots of introductory and explanatory guides to **PRINCE2** on the market, but if your serious...

This is the authoritative guide published by the current owners of the PRINCE2 methodology set. The **methodology has evolved** a lot since I bought my 1998 edition, so do spend the money and get a current copy, if you are going to be studying the PRINCE@ methodology.

Part 4: More Demanding Project Management Books, with a Higher Technical Content

Our last part is dedicated to serious students of Project Management. I've only listed three project management books here, and one of them is more a catalogue.

A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK Guide 6th Edition **Project Management Institute**

This is the PMI's guide to its body of knowledge. It is a hugely valuable reference book but a poor place to start learning from. It contains a huge amount of information but does not set out to teach or to describe the underlying principles.

If you plan to get either the PMI's Project Management Professional or Certified Associate in Project Management qualification, this will be your primary reference work.

Darn it but every edition grows massively, and this 6th Edition (September 2017) dwarfs my first edition (1996)! This is quintessentially a reference book, but if you are serious about a [project management career](#), this is one of the few essential project management books.

You can also get PMBOK packaged with PMI's Agile Practice Guide, co-authored with the Agile Alliance. That's the link I'll give below. The price is only a little more.

But I can't complete this without my BIG GRIPE about this book. PMI cares about copyright theft. So, this book is printed on special anti-counterfeit paper that has a sort of watermark that renders its pages a not-quite-uniform gray. This makes it hard to read. It's a slap in the face for everyone who pays a lot of money to buy a copy, including PMI's own members, whom I believe PMI should treat with more respect. </rant>

Project Management: A Managerial Approach 9th Edition **Jack R. Meredith & Samuel J. Mantel Jr.**

To be honest, my copy is the third edition and 20 years old. But this was my reference manual when I was learning, so I can heartily recommend the latest edition. It's a textbook, so you get a huge amount of content, lots of detail and, whilst easily readable, it ain't reading-for-pleasure.

But if you're a serious student of PM, or you want a good solid reference book on your shelves, to see you through years of *'let me just look that up'*, then you'll want this. Maybe save some money by picking up a second hand 7th or 8th edition. For me, this is one of my truly indispensable project management books.

Project Management in Practice 6th Edition

Jack R. Meredith, Samuel J. Mantel Jr, Scott M. Shafer & Margaret M. Sutton

A lighter-weight text book than its cousin (above). I haven't seen it, but this may suit you as a halfway house (though it's priced a little beyond half way).

Textbook pricing is shocking (and arguably unethical). And, for reasons I cannot fathom, the 6th Edition is currently not on sale as a print copy n the UK Amazon, so the button links to the previous, 5th, edition.