

**THE BUTLER DID IT:  
THE SANDAGE METHOD\* OF  
DEVOURING THE BOOK  
IN GRADATE SCHOOL**

**Everyone knows the Butler did it. But in graduate school, you don't have time to enjoy the whole mystery. You have to be able to very quickly take in who did it, how they did it, why they did it, when and where they did it, and who else knew about it. This method will help you get the answers that you need quickly and confidently and allow you to survive graduate school reading without undue stress.**

**First Things First: Read the Title, the Whole Title and Nothing But the Title.** Although this may not tell you the key to the mystery, it may give a clue. Pay special attention to what comes after the ubiquitous colon: although titles such as *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*<sup>1</sup> or *Bowing to Necessities*<sup>2</sup> are catchy and readily remembered, the subtitles give you the content in a very succinct form. In most cases, the complete title will give you the answers to where and when, as well as other clues to the questions you need to answer.

**Read the Table of Contents.** Each author has a particular approach to presenting information. The answer to the murder mystery is usually in the final chapter. In history books, this is not always the case. One clue to the chapter containing the identity of the murderer is to choose the one chapter that you have little or no clue to the content based upon the title. This is often a key concept that the author has developed in the course of the book. This is the chapter you need to read first; but not yet.

**Scan the Footnotes.** You may have thought the footnotes were nothing more than citations for where the reader can find the same information. However, they contain far more. Find the longest footnotes over the course of the book. They often contain several titles and their authors, as well as some additional thoughts by the author of the book that you are reading. This is the information you need to know to locate the relevant historiography, to know who else is engaged in the same general topic as the author. In short, these were the other people who knew about the murder. Footnotes can also provide general clues as to opportunities the murderer had to commit the crime.

**Take a Good Look at the Index.** As simple as this sounds, this is a seldom-used approach to a book. For most readers, the index is superfluous. However, in trying to ascertain the main arguments of the book quickly, it is crucial to look at the index. The longest entries will provide information on the major themes of the book, and often give you all the information that you need regarding the motive and the method of the murderer.

**Read the Chapter That Tells You that the Butler Did It.** Like any good mystery, a well-written history will recap methods, motives and opportunities when they finally unveil the murderer. Other potential perpetrators will be ruled out. Concise statements of the main argument will be found here.

**Skim the Rest of the Book.** Now that you know exactly how the victim was murdered, why and by whom, it is easy to skim the rest of the book and look primarily for how the story is built around the butler, skipping quickly past the references to the other potential murderers and watch for the clues that relate directly to the butler's role in the crime.

**Compress All the Information into a Single Page Summary Containing All of the Above Information.** This allows for quick and easy review as necessary, whether it's reviewing for a paper or preparing for your comprehensive exams.

\*With sincere gratitude and apologies to Dr. Scott Sandage for anything that may have been inadvertently omitted or misrepresented.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*.

<sup>2</sup> C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*.