

James Branch Cabell · 1892

There Must Be a Word for It!

From Guru to Tsundoku





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Descriptive as the English language is, there are some life experiences for which there are no single words or phrases, which is where English **borrows words from other languages**.

Can you match the following nine words to their languages of origin (Arabic, Chinese, French, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Sanskrit, or Spanish)?

The answers are at the end of the next page.

anonymous – cartoon – cigar – cookie – guru – ketchup – loot – safari – tsundoku

Remembering the word 'sudoku', you probably correctly guessed that 'tsundoku' is Japanese.

A headline from a *BBC News* article explains: 'Tsundoku: The art of buying books and never reading them'.

The desire to own more books than one can possibly read in a human lifetime is so universal that Japanese has a specific word for it.

The Cambridge Dictionary now defines 'tsundoku' as 'the practice of buying a lot of books and keeping them in a pile because you intend to read them but have not done so yet'.

If you're a book **hoarder** (like me and my wife), you're probably **relieved** to know that now we can at least name our **affliction**. This

leads to the interesting question of how to organize hundreds (or thousands) of books. Here are some ideas to consider.



The 'two-thirds rule'

Remember the old adage 'Less is more'? To avoid a feeling of overcrowding, keep each of your shelves just two-thirds full. 30 per cent open space allows a greater appreciation of what is there.



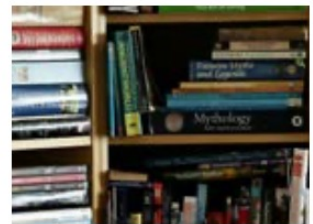
The placement of objects

Intersperse your books with your favourite objects, such as family photos, holiday souvenirs, **heirlooms**, sculptures, or a vase of flowers. Change or replace these as the fancy takes you.



The book stack

Consider the relationship of vertically stacked versus horizontally placed books. It's much more comfortable to read horizontal book titles than it is to read sideways and head-flip 180 degrees with every change from an English book to a German one and back again.



Serendipity

Why organize your books at all? There's surprise and discovery in randomness. We appreciate this when we **peruse** the strange mix of books in beach houses, summer cottages, and second-hand bookshops. Rejoice in the unexpected choice.



Making rainbows

Consider organizing your books rainbow-style by the colour of their covers – in other words, by grouping all the reds, yellows, greens, blues, and violet-coloured books together. What a great way to quieten the visual **clutter**!



Positioning

One final tip is to resist pushing books toward the back wall. Instead, bring them all forward to the leading edge of the bookshelf. This ensures a **uniform** look and hides tell-tale dust.

Before you go, do you think we need a digital equivalent of *tsundoku*? How about 'E-*tsundoku*' or 'tsunkindle'?

Paul Smith

P.S. If you have any comments or questions about this article, just drop me a line at: paul@smith.de. I'm always happy to hear from you.



Answers:

- anonymous = Greek (something or someone without a name, someone who does not reveal their identity)

- cartoon = Italian (originally a drawing on hard paper, transformed into comical representation in 1843)

- cigar = Spanish (a cylinder of dried and fermented tobacco rolled in tobacco leaves for the purpose of smoking)

- cookie = Dutch (rolled, sliced, and baked sweet dough, from the Dutch term 'koekje')

- guru = Sanskrit (an individual with influential leadership, exceptional knowledge, and deep, thought-provoking intelligence)

- ketchup = Chinese (in 1692 'Kestiap' referred to a concoction of pickled fish and spices; by the 1790s tomatoes had been added to the sauce)

- loot = Hindi (stolen goods or property)

- safari = Arabic (an expedition to observe animals in their natural habitat)

- *tsundoku* = Japanese (the art of buying books and never reading them)

Vocabulary Trainer

• to borrow words from another language	Wörter aus einer anderen Sprache entlehnen
• hoarder	Sammler(in)
• relieved	erleichtert
• affliction	Krankheit/Leiden
• heirloom	Erbstück
• serendipity	glücklicher Zufall
• to peruse	durchsehen/durchlesen
• clutter	Gerümpel/ Durcheinander
• uniform	einheitlich