

20 Years of Nonfiction Bestselling Books by Category

(Information from amazon.com for 2000-2019 compiled by Kara Lane)

As an author, I was curious to know what type of nonfiction books are most widely read. Amazon lists their bestselling books by year, so I looked at the top 20 list for each year between 2000 and 2019 and excluded fiction books.

During the past 20 years, a total of 144 nonfiction books written by 117 authors made the top 20 list. Some books continue to make the list year after year (like StrengthsFinder 2.0). Others are fads (like adult coloring books).

To make the list more meaningful, I sorted it into categories that best describe what each book is about. The top 5 book categories are political (25%), self-help (15%), food, diet & cookbooks (13%), business (8%) and religion (7%).

I highlighted the 15 books that were top sellers for 3+ years, and I plan to research the story behind their success. I'll analyze factors like (1) topic chosen, (2) quality of content, (3) writing style, (4) expertise and platform of author, (5) strategies used to distribute and market the book, (6) whether the book is required reading for students, employees, church members, etc., and (7) what role luck played. If you're subscribed to my email list, you'll receive my research results.

I hope you find the following list of nonfiction best sellers interesting and useful!

Kara Lane

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Year(s) in which Each Book Made the Top 20 Best Sellers List	Book Title	Author	Year Published	Category	# Books	% Books
Books making the top 20 list in 3+ years between 2000 & 2019						
2015	ACB: Mandalas and Henna Inspired Flowers, Animals...	Coloring Books for Adults	2015	Adult Coloring Books		
2015	ACB: Stress Relieving Animal Designs	Blue Star Coloring	2015	Adult Coloring Books		
2015	ACB: Stress Relieving Patterns	Blue Star Coloring	2015	Adult Coloring Books		
2015	Enchanted Forest	Johanna Basford	2015	Adult Coloring Books		
2015	Secret Garden	Johanna Basford	2013	Adult Coloring Books	5	3%
2006	Cesar's Way	Cesar Millan	2006	Animals		
2006	Marley & Me	John Grogan	2005	Animals		
2003	Seabiscuit	Laura Hillenbrand	1999	Animals	3	2%
2013	Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead	Sheryl Sandberg	2013	Business		
2006	Good to Great and the Social Sectors	Jim Collins	2005	Business		
2005	Winning	Jack Welch	2005	Business		
2003, 2002	Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done	Larry Bossidy	2002	Business		
2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002	Good to Great	Jim Collins	2001	Business		
2016	The Magnolia Story	Chip and Joanna Gaines	2016	Business - Biography		
2011	Steve Jobs	Walter Isaacson	2011	Business - Biography		
2001	Jack: Straight from the Gut	Jack Welch	2001	Business - Biography		
2008, 2007, 2006, 2005	The Five Dysfunctions of a Team	Patrick Lencioni	2002	Business - Fable		
2002, 2001	Fish: A Proven Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results	Stephen C. Lundin	2000	Business - Fable		
2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000	Who Moved My Cheese?	Spencer Johnson	1998	Business - Fable	11	8%
2010	The Big Short	Michael Lewis	2010	Finance & Economics		
2007	The Age of Turbulence	Alan Greenspan	2007	Finance & Economics		
2002, 2001, 2000	Rich Dad, Poor Dad	Robert T. Kiyosaki	1997	Finance & Economics	3	2%
2018	Magnolia Table: A Collection of Recipes for Gathering	Joanna Gaines	2018	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2019	Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat	Samin Nosrat	2017	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		

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2018	The Plant Paradox	Steven R. Gundry, MD	2017	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2018	The Complete Ketogenic Diet for Beginners	Amy Ramos	2016	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2017	The Instant Pot Electric Pressure Cooker Cooking	Laurel Randolph	2016	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2017, 2016	The Whole30	Melissa Hartwig	2015	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2011	The 17 Day Diet	Mike Moreno	2010	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2010	Food Rules	Michael Pollan	2009	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2008	Eat This, Not That!	David Zinczenko	2008	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2007	Deceptively Delicious	Jessica Seinfeld	2007	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2007, 2006	YOU: On a Diet	Michael Roizen (Mehmet Oz)	2006	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2004	The South Beach Diet Cookbook	Arthur Agatston M.D.	2004	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2004	The South Beach Diet Good Fats/Good Carbs Guide	Arthur Agatston M.D.	2004	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2004, 2003	The South Beach Diet	Arthur Agatston M.D.	2003	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2003	The Ultimate Weight Solution	Dr. Phil McGraw	2003	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2003	500 Low-Carb Recipes	Dana Carpender	2002	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2003	Dr. Atkin's New Diet Revolution	Robert C. Atkins M.D.	2002	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2002	The Sopranos Family Cookbook	Artie Bucco	2002	Food, Diet & Cookbooks		
2000	Eating Well for Optimum Health	Andrew Weil M.D.	1975	Food, Diet & Cookbooks	19	13%
2007	YOU: Staying Young	Michael Roizen (Mehmet Oz)	2007	Health & Wellness		
2006, 2005	YOU: The Owner's Manual	Michael Roizen (Mehmet Oz)	2005	Health & Wellness		
2001, 2000	Body for Life	Bill Phillips	1999	Health & Wellness		
2002	The Wisdom of Menopause	Christiane Northrup	1999	Health & Wellness	4	3%
2000	Talking Dirty with the Queen of Clean	Linda Cobb	2000	Home	1	1%
2014	What if?	Randall Munroe	2014	Humor		
2010	Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 1	Mark Twain (Editor Harriet Smith)	2010	Humor		
2010	Sh*t My Dad Says	Justin Halpern	2010	Humor		
2000	The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook	Joshua Piven	1999	Humor	4	3%
2013	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders	American Psychiatric Assn.	2013	Medical		
2013, 2012, 2011, 2010	Publication Manual of the American Psychological Assn.	American Psychological Assn.	2009	Medical	2	1%
2019, 2018	Educated	Tara Westover	2018	Memoir		
2017, 2016	Hillbilly Elegy	J.D. Vance	2016	Memoir		
2016	When Breath Becomes Air	Paul Kalanithi	2016	Memoir		
2009, 2008, 2007	Three Cups of Tea	Greg Mortenson	2007	Memoir		
2008, 2007	Eat, Pray, Love	Elizabeth Gilbert	2006	Memoir		
2007	The Glass Castle	Jeannette Walls	2005	Memoir		
2000	Tuesdays with Morrie	Mitch Albom	1997	Memoir	7	5%
2016	Hamilton: The Revolution	Lin-Manuel Miranda	2016	Music		
2010	Life	Keith Richards	2010	Music		
2000	The Beatles Anthology	The Beatles	2000	Music	3	2%
2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007	StrengthsFinder 2.0	Tom Rath (Gallup)	2007	Personal Assessment		
2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001	Now, Discover Your Strengths	Donald O. Clifton (Gallup)	2001	Personal Assessment		
2002, 2001, 2000	First, Break All the Rules	Marcus Buckingham (Gallup)	1999	Personal Assessment	3	2%
2015	Humans of New York Stories	Brandon Stanton	2013	Photography		
2014	Humans of New York	Brandon Stanton	2010	Photography	2	1%
2002	Slander: Liberal Lies and the American Right	Ann Coulter	2002	Political		
2018	A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, and Leadership	James Comey	2018	Political		
2018	Fear: Trump in the White House	Bob Woodward	2018	Political		
2018	Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House	Michael Wolff	2018	Political		
2013	Things That Matter	Charles Krauthammer	2013	Political		

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2009	Glenn Beck's Common Sense	Glenn Beck	2009	Political			
2009	Liberty and Tyranny	Mark R. Levin	2009	Political			
2006	State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III	Bob Woodward	2006	Political			
2006	The Audacity of Hope	Barack Obama	2006	Political			
2004	Plan of Attack	Bob Woodward	2004	Political			
2004	Unfit for Command	John E. O'Neill	2004	Political			
2002	Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News	Bernard Goldberg	2001	Political			
2002	Stupid White Men	Michael Moore	2001	Political			
2000	The O'Reilly Factor	Bill O'Reilly	2000	Political			
2019, 2018	Becoming	Michelle Obama	2018	Political - Biography			
2017	What Happened	Hillary Rodham Clinton	2017	Political - Biography			
2010	Decision Points	George W. Bush	2010	Political - Biography			
2009	Going Rogue	Sarah Palin	2009	Political - Biography			
2004	My Life	Bill Clinton	2004	Political - Biography			
2003	Living History	Hillary Rodham Clinton	2003	Political - Biography			
2001	John Adams	David McCullough	1991	Political - Biography			
2008	Dreams from My Father	Barack Obama	1995	Political - Biography			
2006, 2005	The World is Flat	Thomas Friedman	2005	Political - Globalization			
2016	Killing the Rising Sun	Bill O'Reilly (Martin Dugard)	2016	Political - History			
2014	Killing Patton	Bill O'Reilly (Martin Dugard)	2014	Political - History			
2012	Killing Kennedy	Bill O'Reilly (Martin Dugard)	2012	Political - History			
2012	No Easy Day	Kevin Maurer	2012	Political - History			
2012, 2011	Killing Lincoln	Bill O'Reilly (Martin Dugard)	2011	Political - History			
2014, 2012, 2011, 2010	Unbroken	Laura Hillenbrand	2010	Political - History			
2005	1776	David McCullough	2005	Political - History			
2018	Whose Boat Is This Boat?	Stephen Colbert Staff	2018	Political - Humor			
2007	I am America (And So Can You!)	Stephen Colbert	2007	Political - Humor			
2004	America (The Book)	Jon Stewart	2004	Political - Humor			
2003	Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them	Al Franken	2003	Political - Humor			
2004	Against All Enemies	Richard A. Clarke	2004	Political - Terrorism			
2004	The 9/11 Commission Report	National Comm. on Terrorism	2004	Political - Terrorism	36	25%	
2009, 2008	Outliers: The Story of Success	Malcolm Gladwell	2008	Popular Culture			
2006, 2005	Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking	Malcolm Gladwell	2005	Popular Culture			
2006, 2005	Freakonomics	Steven D. Levitt	2005	Popular Culture			
2006, 2005	The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference	Malcolm Gladwell	2000	Popular Culture	4	3%	
2004	Eats, Shoots & Leaves	Lynne Truss	2003	Punctuation	1	1%	
2019	It's Not Supposed to Be This Way	Lysa TerKeurst	2018	Religion			
2013	Killing Jesus	Bill O'Reilly (Martin Dugard)	2013	Religion			
2013, 2012	Proof of Heaven	Eben Alexander III	2012	Religion			
2011	Heaven is for Real	Lynn Vincent	2010	Religion			
2010	Women Food and God	Geneen Roth	2009	Religion			
2010	Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God	Francis Chan	2008	Religion			
2009	The Love Dare	Alex Kendrick	2008	Religion			
2014, 2013	Jesus Calling	Sarah Young	2004	Religion			
2005, 2004, 2003	The Purpose-Driven Life	Rick Warren	2002	Religion			
2001	The Prayer of Jabez	Bruce H. Wilkinson	2000	Religion	10	7%	
2017	Astrophysics for People in a Hurry	Neil deGrasse Tyson	2017	Science			
2005	Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed	Jared Diamond	2004	Science			
2003	A Short History of Nearly Everything	Bill Bryson	2003	Science	3	2%	
2019	Girl, Stop Apologizing	Rachel Hollis	2019	Self-Help - Motivational			
2019, 2018	Girl, Wash Your Face	Rachel Hollis	2018	Self-Help - Motivational			
2019, 2018, 2017	The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck	Mark Manson	2016	Self-Help - Motivational			
2016, 2015	The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up	Marie Kondo	2014	Self-Help - Motivational			
2018	12 Rules for Life	Jordan B. Peterson	2018	Self-Help - Personal Growth			
2017	Make Your Bed	Admiral William H. McRaven	2017	Self-Help - Personal Growth			

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2018, 2017	You Are a Badass	Jen Sincero	2013	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2008	The Last Lecture	Randy Pausch	2008	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2002	Self Matters	Dr. Phil McGraw	2001	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2019, 2001, 2000	The Four Agreements	Don Miguel Ruiz	1997	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2006	The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People	Stephen R. Covey	1989	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2017, 2016	How to Win Friends and Influence People	Dale Carnegie	1936	Self-Help - Personal Growth		
2009	Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man	Steve Harvey	2009	Self-Help - Relationships		
2004	He's Just Not That Into You	Greg Behrendt	2004	Self-Help - Relationships		
2004	The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands	Laura Schlessinger	2003	Self-Help - Relationships		
2002	A Mind at a Time	Mel Levine M.D.	2002	Self-Help - Relationships		
2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2013	The 5 Love Languages	Gary Chapman	1992	Self-Help - Relationships		
2008, 2007	The Secret	Rhonda Byrne	2006	Self-Help - Spiritual		
2008	A New Earth	Eckhart Tolle	2005	Self-Help - Spiritual		
2008	The Power of Now	Eckhart Tolle	1997	Self-Help - Spiritual		
2000	The Seat of the Soul	Gary Zukav	1989	Self-Help - Spiritual	21	15%
2014, 2013, 2012, 2011	The Official SAT Study Guide (2nd edition)	The College Board	2009	Study Guide		
2007, 2006, 2005	The Official SAT Study Guide	The College Board	2004	Study Guide	2	1%
TOTAL NONFICTION BOOKS					144	100%

If you have any insights into why and how these books became bestsellers, I'd love to hear from you. You can reach me at kara@karalane.com.