

*The Bookend Effect* carries a simple enough premise – that we can harness two phases of the day when our brain is most open to change. That is, just after waking and just before sleep. They are the bookends.

It follows a familiar style, with three sections that are then broken down into chapters that are presented as essays on the subject covered.

First, it covers a broad introduction, looking at the fundamentals of the theory. Next it considers the tools you need to use this methodology. And finally, it looks at the barriers to the process.

The book follows a simple methodology to lead the reader in, the chapters building as they go to make for as natural a flow through the theory as possible.

As a writer it is an interesting concept – the bookend effect is also a narrative technique where a story, or scene, begins and ends with similar elements. This helps create cohesion, closure and development. It is often used in screenplays and especially in fiction with a quest style story.

So, what about our personal quest here?

There isn't much point in me going through the book chapter by chapter – that's exactly how you are meant to use it! Rather, let's look at the key themes that can be extracted.

The central idea is that the brain is constantly trying to impose structure on experience, and that is especially prevalent at the beginning and end of events. These are the bookends, and through them we can then interpret the filling in between. Whilst this is an observation on psychology it is also used as a practical tool.

I am reminded of a presentation technique – tell them what you will tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them. Another example of bookends in play.

The book also looks at memory distortion and cognitive shortcuts. That expands to show how that memory is not a simple recording device, but a reconstruction. The book looks at how we misremember, how we fill the gaps, how we use shortcuts. This lends itself to our lived experience, that the framework is often more memorable than the content.

The book also looks at emotional anchoring. This focuses on how the intensity at the start or end of an experience will shape our judgement of it. We've all heard the phrase "first impressions count" and that is one part of this type of theory. The book then explores why certain failures haunt us and some successes feel hollow, leading to an understanding of repeating unhelpful patterns.

Building on that theme is the concept of becoming stuck in cycles. The bookends are there, they are strong, and we follow them. But we can get stuck and even end up following the negative patterns.

That builds nicely to the idea that we should be create the patterns with greater intention. Having recognised that the bookends are more significant, it makes best sense to set the openings and aim for healthier closure. That breaks the negative loops and brings control. This section is where the self-help is more to the fore, using the theory to change our own behaviour.

The book thrives when blending the neuroscience with anecdotally styled examples. It's all very well theorising but we need to understand how to apply the theory.

This is where the book comes into its own – it's practical. It isn't just theories and ideas, there are strong examples of how to make changes. That's essential as without those practicalities it's just an idea.

It's also very easy to read. The chapters aren't too long, they are then broken down into very digestible subsections. It comes together as a whole, a way of approaching your day to make fundamental changes, rather than having to learn some complex mantra.

The theories are very clearly presented without becoming mired in technical terms. It feels like a book to read then reach too when you need a refresh. The strongest line is perhaps one of the subheadings – How Simple Shifts Can Change Your Course.

That really is this in a nutshell. It's not actually that difficult, you just need some guidance to find the path.