

Four ways in

Where to start, depending on why you picked Seneca up.

If you have an hour

Read *On the Shortness of Life* straight through. It is the most famous thing Seneca wrote, it is complete, and it needs nothing else around it. Then chapter XIV, the one about philosophy giving you every previous age to live in, a second time.

If you are trying to change how you live

On Peace of Mind, starting with Serenus's opening speech — the most accurate description of being stuck that survives from antiquity. Then *On the Shortness of Life*, which is the same argument with the diagnosis removed and the urgency added.

If you want to know whether Seneca can be trusted

Go straight to *On the Happy Life*, chapter XVII, where somebody says *you talk one way and live another*, and read to the end. Twelve chapters of self-defence by the richest philosopher in Rome. Then read the Chronology, and decide.

If you have read the Meditations

Start with the Concordance, which records what George Long — the translator of the Valice *Meditations* — said about Seneca and where the two books touch. Then *On Providence*, which is the closest Seneca comes to Marcus's theology, and note that its last chapter is the one Long cites and disagrees with.

The five dialogues

On the Shortness of Life — *De Brevitate Vitae*, to Paulinus. 20 chapters.

On Peace of Mind — *De Tranquillitate Animi*, to Serenus. 17 chapters.

On the Happy Life — *De Vita Beata*, to Gallio. 28 chapters.

On Providence — *De Providentia*, to Lucilius. 6 chapters.

On Leisure — *De Otio*, to Serenus. 8 chapters.