

The ability to read fluently—quickly and with adequate comprehension—can make an enormous difference in an academic context. Your reading fluency may improve somewhat with work on vocabulary and comprehension skills. But the only way to make a real difference is through a lot of reading (as you learned in Part 1) and through practice with timed readings. This is what you will learn about and practice in this part of the book.

## Why Read Faster?

There are three important reasons for learning to read faster:

### 1. *You can be a more efficient reader.*

This will help you with homework, class work, and tests. It will also make reading books, magazines, and newspapers more enjoyable—so you'll probably read more.

### 2. *You can improve your knowledge of English.*

If you read faster and you read more, you'll encounter more words and phrases and get more language input from your reading. You will have more practice getting meaning from sentences and longer passages. This will help you:

- learn more vocabulary.
- understand how sentences work.
- learn what words are used together.
- become a better writer.

### 3. *You can improve your comprehension.*

How is this possible? The answer is very simple: when you read slowly, you read one word at a time. Your eyes and your brain take in each word separately. This is like reading a text with extra spaces between the words.

#### Example:

*Try reading these sentences with separated words. Is it easier or harder to read this way?*

What                      really      happens      when      we  
read?      Many      people      think      we      read  
one                      word                      at                      a                      time.      They  
think                      we                      read                      a  
word,                      understand                      it,                      and  
then                      move                      on      to                      the                      next                      word.

You probably found it harder to read this way. The separate words are separate pieces of information that your short-term memory must try to hold on to. With short sentences, this may not matter much. But when you read longer sentences, you may not be able to keep the words in your memory long enough to make sense of the sentences.

When you read faster, on the other hand, your eyes and your brain group words together to form ideas. Your brain works more efficiently with these than with single words, so it is easier to make sense of the sentences and of the passage.

In fact, your brain tends to group words together in a way that makes sense. This is true for both reading and listening. You can hear the “thought groups” [groups of words that form an idea] when you listen to fluent speakers, especially when they are reading aloud or giving a lecture or speech. They naturally make pauses between thought groups to allow listeners to understand better.

**Example:**

*Read the sentences silently while your teacher reads them aloud. What groups of words do you hear?*

What really happens when we read? Many people think we read one word at a time. They think we read a word, understand it, and then move on to the next word.

Different readers group words differently, depending on how they interpret the text. Readers who are more fluent tend to group more words together than slow readers. Here is the way a reader might group the sentences above:

What really happens / when we read? / Many people think / we read one word / at a time. / They think / we read a word, / understand it, / and then move on / to the next word.

When you read faster, you naturally group words together. This is why you understand better.

**Note:** You should not try to read faster all the time. Certain types of text need to be read slowly and carefully—such as, instructions, cookbook recipes, poetry, or technical explanations. You should aim for flexibility, speeding up or slowing down as necessary.



## Strategies for Reading Faster

You can learn to improve your reading rate—read faster—by following these strategies.

### ***1. Check your reading habits.***

Some habits can slow you down when you are reading. Think about your own reading habits:

#### **Do you try to pronounce each word as you read?**

You will probably understand less this way. If you are trying to say and understand the words, your brain has to do two things at the same time. (You can practice saying the sentences after you read them silently.)

#### **Do you move your lips when you read silently?**

If you do, you are probably thinking each word to yourself. You will have the same problems as someone who pronounces the words.

#### **Do you point at the words with your finger or a pencil?**

If you do, your eyes will follow your finger or pencil word by word across the lines. However, your eyes need to be free to follow your thinking. You may need to go back and check a word, or you may want to skip ahead.

#### **Do you try to translate into your native language while you are reading in English?**

If you do, you will have to stop often to think about the translation, and it will be harder to follow the story or the ideas. When you translate, you will also be thinking in your language, not in English.

### ***2. Skip or guess unknown words.***

#### **Skip words that are not necessary for understanding the passage.**

It is not necessary to know the meaning of every word. You may be able to follow the story or understand the ideas even when there are words you don't know. (See Part 1, Unit 1, Exercise 1, page 5.).

#### **Guess the general meaning of the words you need to understand the passage.**

You can learn a lot about a word from the words or sentences around it (the context). It is often possible to understand the general meaning. This will allow you to continue reading and follow the story or ideas. (See Part 2, Unit 3, for more about guessing meaning.)

### 3. Time yourself.

#### Time yourself with passages for fluency practice.

By timing how long it takes you to read a series of passages of the same length, you can find out how fast you read now and then work on improving your reading rate. Questions following the readings allow you to check your comprehension. The units in Part 4 include three sets of six timed reading passages.

#### Time yourself in your extensive reading book.

In Part 1, Unit 3, on page 27, you learn how to time yourself and do reading sprints in your extensive reading book.

### Guidelines for Timed Reading

1. Before you start, write down the *exact* time shown on your watch or clock (minutes and seconds).
2. Preview each passage quickly before reading it.
3. Read the passage and write down the exact time you finish.
4. Answer the questions without looking back at the passage. Then check your answers with your teacher.
5. Read the passage again. Look for the answers to the questions that were incorrect.
6. Find your reading time: your finishing time minus your starting time.

**Example:** Finishing time: 10:14:30 (14 minutes and 30 seconds after 10 o'clock)

Starting time: 10:10:45

Reading time: 3:45 (3 minutes and 45 seconds)

7. Find your reading rate on the Reading Rate Table on page 263. Write your reading rate and your comprehension score [the number of correct answers] on the progress chart on page 264.
8. After reading four passages, check your progress.
9. If your reading rate has stayed the same, you should push yourself to read faster.
10. If you have more than three incorrect answers on any passage, you might be trying to read too quickly. Slow down a little and read more carefully.



## PRACTICE

A. Write your starting time. Preview and then read the passage.

Starting time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Using Cell Phones: Cultural Differences

What do you do if your cell phone rings while you are with a group of people? If you are French, you will probably ignore the call. If you are English, you may walk away from the group to answer it. If you are Spanish, you are likely to answer it there in the middle of the group and invite everyone around you to join the conversation.

As many travelers have noticed, there are significant differences from one country to another in the way people use their cell phones. This has been confirmed by a recent study of cell phone use in three European cities—Madrid, London, and Paris. In spite of the fact that these cities are all in the European Union and share a great deal of history and culture, local customs still vary considerably. These customs influence the way people in these cities make use of their phones in public.

According to Amparo Lasén, the Spanish sociologist who conducted the study, there were no real surprises for anyone who is familiar with the customs in these countries. Lasén interviewed people and observed their behavior in three different settings in each city: a major train station, a commercial area, and a business district.

She found that Londoners use their cell phones the least in public. If they are with others, they prefer to let calls be answered by voice mail [a recorded message], and then they check for voice messages later. If the English do answer a call on the street, they seem to dislike talking with others around. They tend to move away from a crowded sidewalk and seek out a place where they cannot be heard, such as the far side of a subway entrance or even the edge of a street. They seem to feel that the danger of stepping into speeding traffic is preferable to the risk of having their conversation be overheard. Even when it is raining—as it often is in London—people still prefer not to hold their conversations where others could hear. It seems they'd rather stay out in the rain than move into a protected doorway where there are other people.

This has led to a behavior that Lasén has called “clustering.” At a busy time of day on the streets of London, you may find small crowds of cell phone users grouped together, each one talking into a cell phone. They seem to assume that others on phones are too occupied with their own calls to listen in.

In Madrid, on the other hand, few people use voice mail because the Spanish dislike talking to a machine rather than a real person. If no one answers a call, they prefer not to leave a message, but try again later or wait for a return call. And since the Spanish are not shy about answering their calls in public, the return call may come sooner than it would in London or Paris. In fact, in Madrid it is common to hear loud and lively phone conversations on the street, accompanied by shouts, laughter, and the waving of hands. In fact, sometimes it happens that a group of friends may be walking down the street together, each talking on their own phone, but smiling and nodding as though it were one large conversation that everyone could hear.

Even when they are not using their phones, the Spanish often hold them in their hands as they walk down the street or put them on the table at a restaurant, so they will not miss any incoming calls. In a movie theater, not only do cell phones occasionally ring, but people sometimes answer them and have brief conversations.

This would not be acceptable in Paris, however. The French have much stricter rules about how and when to use cell phones in public. It is not considered polite to use a phone in a restaurant, for instance, though it might be acceptable in the more informal setting of a café. In general, the French are very disapproving of phone use in public and are quick to express that disapproval, even to strangers. One

special custom that has developed in cafés seems unique to Paris. Young women often place their cell phones on the table beside them to signal that they are expecting someone. When the friend arrives, the phone is put away.

In one area, the study found that the French and Spanish behaved in a similar way. Both were quite willing to continue a phone conversation in a romantic situation, even kissing someone present while continuing a conversation on the phone. These people were clearly not using videophones. In London, on the other hand, no one was ever observed to be kissing while on the telephone. The English apparently prefer to have more privacy for their phone calls and their romantic moments.

The study thus confirms certain cultural stereotypes about the people in each of the three cities. Lasén reported that the reactions to her as she was conducting her research were also interesting—and in line with the stereotypes. When people noticed her in Paris, they frowned at her; in London, they pretended not to notice; in Madrid, however, they did not seem to mind.

Understanding the habits of these European cell phone users has become a lively topic of study for sociologists and psychologists at European universities. But with one billion cell phone users around the world, the subject is of interest not only to academic researchers. Habits of cell phone use are also a matter of serious study by telecommunications companies. If they can understand the local customs and customers better, they might be able to change people's behavior and increase cell phone use. For example, if phone companies want to increase their profits in France, they need to convince people that it is acceptable to use their phones in restaurants. The Spanish need to be persuaded that voice mail is not so bad, and the English must learn to leave their phones on all the time.

**B. Write your finishing time: \_\_\_\_\_ Then turn the page and answer the questions. Do not look back at the passage.**



1. Which statement best expresses the overall idea of this passage?
    - a. People in different European cities have different social customs.
    - b. People use their cell phones differently in London, Paris, and Madrid.
    - c. People in Madrid tend to speak more loudly than those in Paris or London.
  2. A Spanish sociologist has said that the way people use their cell phones
    - a. fits in with their local habits and customs.
    - b. is the same in all European countries today.
    - c. is related to the person's sex and age.
  3. Londoners use voice mail a lot because they
    - a. enjoy leaving recorded messages.
    - b. like having conversations with others.
    - c. prefer not to answer calls in public.
  4. Which of the following was NOT mentioned in the passage?
    - a. Cell phone users in London tend to cluster together on the street.
    - b. Londoners tend not to make phone calls when it is raining.
    - c. The English don't like to be overheard on the phone.
  5. When they are in groups, the people in Madrid
    - a. continue to answer calls and have phone conversations.
    - b. stop talking and wait when a cell phone rings.
    - c. prefer to leave messages with voice mail.
  6. In a café in Paris, a young woman might leave her phone on the table
    - a. to show that she is waiting for someone.
    - b. to remind herself to make a call.
    - c. to make sure she hears it ringing.
  7. Parisians
    - a. do not like other people to use cell phones in public.
    - b. use cell phones more than the English or the Spanish.
    - d. never continue a phone conversation at a romantic moment.
  8. You can infer from this passage that
    - a. cell phone companies will make less money in European countries.
    - c. weather can be an important factor in the way people use cell phones.
    - d. technology may be global, but the way people use it is not.
- C. Check your answers with your teacher. Write your comprehension score (number of correct answers) in the progress chart.**
- D. Calculate your reading time: Finishing time – Starting time = Reading time: \_\_\_\_\_ Find your reading rate on page 263. Write it in the progress chart on page 264.**
- E. Re-read the passage and look for the answers to any questions that you missed.**
- F. Go back through the passage again and underline the new vocabulary. Select the useful words or phrases you would like to learn and write them in your vocabulary notebook.**

# Reading Rate Table

*All of the passages are about 1000 words long. To find your reading rate, find the reading time that is closest to yours. Then look across at the reading rate column.*

Reading time (minutes)	Reading rate (words per minute)
1:00	1000
1:10	857
1:20	750
1:30	667
1:40	600
1:50	545
2:00	500
2:10	462
2:20	429
2:30	400
2:40	375
2:50	352
3:00	333
3:10	315
3:20	300
3:30	285
3:40	273
3:50	261
4:00	250
4:10	240
4:20	231
4:30	222
4:40	214
4:50	207
5:00	200
5:10	194
5:20	188
5:30	182
5:40	176
5:50	171
6:00	167



## Faster Reading Progress Chart

Next to the exercise number, write the date. Then write the reading rate that is closest to yours and your comprehension score (number of correct answers).

Passage and Date	Reading Rate (WPM)	Comprehension Score	Comments
Practice			
<b>Unit 2</b>			
1	200	6/8	
2	188	6/8	
3	194	6/8	
4			
5			
6			
<b>Unit 3</b>			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
<b>Unit 4</b>			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			