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BSc Degree

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English - 1 (Basic English)
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Reading - Skimming & Scanning

Welcome. Today's episode is on the topic of Reading, Skimming and Scanning. We are going to look at skimming and scanning when it comes to reading material. Reading can be approached in many very different ways. There is detailed reading, focused reading, there are techniques like S Q 3R, PQRS, and many others.

Today, we are looking at a certain approach to reading where there could be a large amount of material and it would be a laborious process actually reading with focus and with detail each and every bit of the material. However, there would be a requirement to gather information from that material for completely different purposes.

So, skimming and scanning come in handy, come of views and can be employed in contexts of reading, where one is not in requirement of understanding each and every word, that is not the purpose, that is not the required outcome of that reading, the outcome could be one to get a sense of the larger picture. Overall, getting an eagle's eye view.

The purpose or the required outcome could also be looking for specific information and trying to identify, if it is available in that particular text. So, let me give you an analogy. If you have been to a fair a mela, an exhibition, where there are lots and lots and lots and lots of stalls all around. One agenda could be to go to each and every stall, observe what is being sold there.

What are the different items, one stall after the other, after the other, after the other? So, let us say there are over 100 stalls. Focus reading would be going to each stall spending time in each one of them. However, let us say you just want to get a general idea of what this exhibition is about, what are all the different things and then you want to take a decision on which style you want to go to?

Or perhaps take a decision on, okay, this is not the kind of exhibition that I wish to be a part of, different choices. So, what might you do? You might go to one area of the exhibition and gently have a quick look at the stalls and get a sense of okay, they seem to be selling this here, selling clothes here, selling furniture there, some equipment in the store.

This area seems to have this kind of sales, or that is the food corner, you get a general sense. Skimming reading is something like that. You are going right into the exhibition. You just want to get a sense of the overall space, what is where what is going on in which place. And then perhaps if something is of specific interest to you, you might go in that direction. So, taking from that analogy, coming back to material that we read.

How do we skim read? So, when we are skimming reading, we need not read each and every word, phrase and sentence. We literally skim through the material. So, you just might go right down the page like that. Reading to get a sense of the larger picture. So, of course, when we start skimming a book, skimming through the table of contents, skimming through the index will definitely give us a sense of the larger picture.

So, skimming through the table of contents, skimming through the index to get an idea of the chapters is helpful. Skimming through the first chapter. And then again, the headings of all the chapters. The first paragraph of a chapter, the introductory part of any piece of text that you are reading, just go through the introduction, go through the conclusion, read a couple of words, in between a couple of sentences in between as part of skimming.

Skimming also includes taking our attention to key words, something written in italics, maybe the headings of a table of a graph of an illustration, the ending line of a paragraph, the starting line of a paragraph, the introductory paragraph, the concluding paragraph, key words phrases that stand out. As I said, in bold, italics, underline, all of these are part of the skimming techniques, ways to skim and read a text.

So if you are getting a sense of this, what we are really doing in this manner is not going completely into the stall, looking at every item that can be purchased, and then come out of the stall. Rather, we are standing at a little distance from where we can glance at all the stalls get a sense of what is being sold where and how.

Which is why, the table of Contents perhaps the foreword, the index of the chapters, the headings of the chapters, the subheadings, the introductory paragraph, the concluding paragraph, other sentences, words, phrases that seem to stand out, maybe that are repeating, which means there is an underlying thread and connection of that particular idea or concept.

Taking your focus to these would be part of skimming and reading. While skimming and reading, we can stop at those keywords or those phrases or those sentences that seem to be significant and conveying something deeper about the concept. Those are points where you

can stop quickly read maybe a few lines before a few lines later to get a sense of what is happening there. And then move ahead.

Reading the summaries of the chapters is also a good idea as part of skimming. So, in what context are we skimming? We are skimming reading in context where we want to get a sense of the meaning of the text. So, this is often used for previewing some material and also for reviewing material. So, when you are previewing the material, you really are trying to understand that do I require to go deeper into this text.

And if I do, which are the chapters that I would require to go deeper into. This can be done through skimming reading, which basically saves you a lot of hours and hours of reading a 600-page material let us say. It saves you from having to sit down with that entire material. Rather skim through it, do the task in an hour instead of maybe half a day.

So, as to arrive at what really is it that I want to read from this text or also filter out what is it that is the not of significance for me, that holds no value for my task and my focused work at hand. Skimming reading can be very valuable in these aspects, to preview the material to review it, to get a sense of what you have looked at, after a detailed reading has been done. The reviewing is also helpful for skimming.

So, quickly repeating the few points related to skimming that could be of help to us, which is going through a text very quickly without specifically pausing at every word and phrase and sentence. Not with the intent of understanding the deeper meaning and the shades of meaning in that particular text, rather, the purpose of skimming is to give us a sense of the eagle's eye view.

Therefore, reading the table of contents, the index of the chapters, the foreword, introduction, introductory paragraphs, concluding paragraphs, starting line of paragraphs, the ending line of paragraphs, skimming through the headings and also skimming for the bold, italics, keywords, phrases that catch your attention, and taking a couple of moments there to stop at those points, to read in depth, if it holds meaning for you, and then go ahead.

And lastly, also skimming through the summaries. So, skimming can be a beautiful tool to give you a larger picture, to help you with a preview of a text to save you a lot of time with your actual reading, to be able to decide what is it that you really wish to read and do not wish to read. With this, we move on to the next one, which is scanning.

Now going back to the example of visiting the exhibition, let us imagine that you have to catch up with a friend who is joining you at the exhibition. Your friend has reached before you have and is at one of the stalls. So, when you enter the exhibition, you are of course trying to give a quick glance around, you are doing the skimming. However, in the back of your mind, there is a very specific purpose.

And unlike the first time, which was to just get a sense of what the exhibition is all about. Now, you are having another intention, which is to locate your friend in one of the stalls. So, taking this analogy, let us go to scanning-reading. When we read and we are scanning what we are reading. Ideally, we do the skimming prior to that. We have already given that quick look of the material just got a sense of what all of it is.

And then when we scan read, we are having in mind a few keywords. You are reading with the intention of locating material related to the keywords which are of specific interest to you. Second, we approach the scanning process. Ideally having one keyword in mind for each time we do the scan. Which means that one particular friend, is whom you are looking out for so you are quickly scanning looking out in your mind for that particular friend.

Next, you keep in mind to just let your eyes sort of float through the entire material all along looking for that specific keyword. And when you reach or find that keyword, you stop there. You stop there and then at that particular point in the text, you are going to read a little before and a little later. You are going to go deeper, not into the entire text, but into the place where you have found material related to the keyword of your interest.

This in a very simple way sums up the process techniques of scanning, reading. So, with scanning reading, ideally, we do the skimming reading first. So, you have sort of glanced through the material got a sense of the larger picture. And then you approach the material. First, knowing that there are these few keywords that are important to you, related to which you are trying to capture material, almost mine it out from all the different things that are present in that text, which could be of no significance or relevance to you.

And then, with each scan, you go with the intent of identifying material related to one key word. Allow your eyes to just flow through the material. And when you look at the keyword of your focus, stop there, read that read material before read material later. This would be a very useful way, once again, of saving you a lot of time. Like in the mining process, where

there is a lot of material available, but not all of it is meaningful to you, you need to locate and mine out that which holds meaning for you.

So, scanning can be very helpful here rather than having to read through all of that material or laboriously go through all of it. Scanning can also be very helpful when you are trying to locate answers to a specific question. So, before you do that, do ensure that you read the question well, and you know the keywords? Or what are the requirements in the answer?

And then when you read your material, look out for the keywords of the question of the answer, and pause when you find your material. And another thing of course, needless to say, not only are we looking at the text, but also at illustrations, tables, anything else that is available. Skim it first so that you get a sense of the cues and of how the matter is organized. After which you can scan it trying to zero in on what exactly you require and need to pick up from there.

Scanning, which requires a lot of focus in the task can at times be overwhelming and can seem to drain out your energy. It is a good idea to choose an undistracted space, to choose a time when you are quite energized to sit down with the task of scanning are highly focused and concentration requiring activity. We come to the end of this episode on reading, skimming and scanning. Thank you.

