**Skimming and scanning: Two important strategies to speed up your reading.** Skimming and scanning are two very different strategies for *speed reading*.

They are each used for different purposes, and they are not meant to be used all the time. They are at the fast end of the speed reading range, while studying is at the slow end.

People who know how to skim and scan are flexible readers. They read according to their purpose and get the information they need quickly without wasting time. They do not read everything which is what increases their reading speed. Their skill lies in knowing what specific information to read and which method to use.

**What Is Skimming?**

Skimming is one of the tools you can use to read more in less time. **Skimming** refers to looking *only* for the general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (or factual) material. With skimming, your overall understanding is reduced because you don’t read everything. You read only what is important to your purpose. Skimming takes place while reading and allows you to look for details in addition to the main ideas.

How to skim.? Many people think that skimming is a haphazard process placing the eyes where ever they fall. However, to skim effectively, there has to be a structure but you don’t read everything. *What you read is more important than what you leave out.* So what material do you read and what material do you leave out?

Let’s say you are doing research on a long chapter or a web site. By reading the first few paragraphs in detail, you will get a good idea of what information will be discussed. Once you know where the reading is headed, you can begin to **read only the first sentence of each paragraph**. Also called *topic sentences*, they give you the main idea of the paragraph. If you do not get the main idea in the topic sentence or if the paragraph greatly interests you, then you may want to skim more.

At the end of each topic sentence, your eyes should drop down through the rest of the paragraph, looking for important pieces of information, such as names, dates, or events. Continue to read only topic sentences, dropping down through the rest of the paragraphs, until you are near the end. Since the last few paragraphs may contain a conclusion or summary, you should stop skimming there and read in detail. Remember that your overall comprehension will be lower than if you read in detail. If while skimming, you feel you are grasping the main ideas, then you are skimming correctly.

When to skim. Because skimming is done at a fast speed with less-than-normal comprehension, you shouldn’t skim all the time. There are many times, however, when skimming is very useful.

Suppose you are taking a presentation skills class and have to deliver an oral report in a few days about the first computers ever made. You locate six books and four newspaper articles about this topic. Because you must be ready soon, you do not have time to read each word, but you need a large quantity of solid information.

Skimming will help you locate the information quickly while making sure you use your time wisely. It will also increase the amount of usable material you obtain for your research.

Suppose you have an exam in a few days. You need to review the material you learned, but you don’t want to reread everything. By skimming, you can quickly locate the information you haven’t mastered yet and study only that material.

While reading, ask yourself the following questions to help you decide whether or not to skim. If you answer yes to any of these, then skimming is a useful tool.

?    Is this material non-fiction?

?    Do I have a lot to read and only a small amount of time?

?    Do I already know something about this?

?    Can any of the material be skipped?

If you have sufficient background knowledge or believe you don’t need the information, then skip it! That’s right—don’t read it at all! Believe it or not, skipping material may sometimes be the best use of your time. Just because someone wrote something doesn’t mean you have to read it.  *If you pick and choose carefully what you skim and skip, you will be pleasantly surprised at the large amount of information you can get through in a short period of time.*

**What Is Scanning?**

Scanning is another useful tool for speeding up your reading. Unlike skimming, when **scanning,** you look *only* for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything. You scan when you look for your favorite show listed in the cable guide, for your friend’s phone number in a telephone book, and for the sports scores in the newspaper. For scanning to be successful, you need to understand how your material is structured as well as comprehend what you read so you can locate the specific information you need. Scanning also allows you to find details and other information in a hurry.

How to scan.  Because you already scan many different types of material in your daily life, learning more details about scanning will be easy. Establishing your purpose, locating the appropriate material, and knowing how the information is structured before you start scanning is essential.

The material you scan is typically arranged in the following ways: alphabetically, chronologically, non-alphabetically, by category, or textually. **Alphabetical** information is arranged in order from A to Z, while **chronological** information is arranged in time or numerical order.

Information can be also be arranged in **non- alphabetical** order, such as a television listing, or by **category**, listings of like items such as an auto parts catalog. Sometimes information is located within the written paragraphs of text, also known as a **textual**sense, as in an encyclopedia entry.

Learning to use your hands while scanning is very helpful in locating specific information. Do you do anything with your hands to locate a word in a dictionary? To find a meeting time on your calendar? To read a train or bus schedule? Using your hand or finger is extremely helpful in focusing your attention and keeping your place while scanning a column of material.

    Your peripheral vision can also help you scan effectively. When your hand moves down a list of names, you see not only the name your finger is pointing to, but also the names above and below. Let your eyes work for you when searching for information.

    Keep the concept of key words in mind while scanning. Your purpose will determine the key words. Suppose you are looking for the time a train leaves from New York City for Washington, D.C. The key words to keep in mind are “from New York City” and “to Washington, D.C.” If you are looking for the cost of a computer printer with the code number PX-710, the key word to locate in a list of many printers is “PX-710.”

When to scan.? You scan when your aim is to find specific pieces of information. If you were doing the research for an oral presentation, you could scan the index of books, web sites, and reference materials. You would discover whether they contain any information you want and the pages where the information can be found.

In the past, you probably scanned without knowing you were doing it. Now with the information provided in this section, you can use scanning more intentionally and frequently. The more you practice, the more effective scanning will become. Finally, the most important benefit of scanning is its ability to help you become a more flexible reader. Scanning adds another high gear to your reading.

Permission to not read everything.? Because you may be used to reading every word and may be uncomfortable leaving some words out, you need to give yourself permission to overlook some words by skimming, scanning, and skipping material according to your reading purpose. I give you permission to NOT read everything!

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**Abby Marks Beale** is America’s #1 Speed Reading Expert and Author of

10 Days to Faster Reading and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Speed Reading.

She has created an online speed reading course called Rev It Up Reading

that gets you up to speed with what you read. For more, please visit [RevItUpReading.com](http://www.revitupreading.com/) to find out about the best speed reading tips and ***best speed reading tips for college students***.

**Exercise 1 – Skimming - THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF A TEACHER**

Read the first sentence of each paragraph in the following text.

Here I want to try to give you an answer to the question: What personal qualities are desirable in a teacher? Probably no two people would draw up exactly similar lists, but I think the following would be generally accepted.

First, the teacher's personality should be pleasantly live and attractive. This does not rule out people who are physically plain, or even ugly, because many such have great personal charm. But it does rule out such types as the over-excitable, melancholy, frigid, sarcastic, cynical, frustrated, and over-bearing: I would say too, that it excludes all of dull or purely negative personality. I still stick to what I said in my earlier book: that school children probably 'suffer more from bores than from brutes'.

Secondly, it is not merely desirable but essential for a teacher to have a genuine capacity for sympathy - in the literal meaning of that word; a capacity to tune in to the minds and feelings of other people, especially, since most teachers are school teachers, to the minds and feelings of children. Closely related with this is the capacity to be tolerant - not, indeed, of what is wrong, but of the frailty and immaturity of human nature which induce people, and again especially children, to make mistakes.

Thirdly, I hold it essential for a teacher to be both intellectually and morally honest. This does not mean being a plaster saint. It means that he will be aware of his intellectual strengths, and limitations, and will have thought about and decided upon the moral principles by which his life shall be guided. There is no contradiction in my going on to say that a teacher should be a bit of an actor. That is part of the technique of teaching, which demands that every now and then a teacher should be able to put on an act - to enliven a lesson, correct a fault, or award praise. Children, especially young children, live in a world that is rather larger than life.

A teacher must remain mentally alert. He will not get into the profession if of low intelligence, but it is all too easy, even for people of above-average intelligence, to stagnate intellectually - and that means to deteriorate intellectually. A teacher must be quick to adapt himself to any situation, however improbable and able to improvise, if necessary at less than a moment's notice. (Here I should stress that I use 'he' and 'his' throughout the book simply as a matter of convention and convenience.)

On the other hand, a teacher must be capable of infinite patience. This, I may say, is largely a matter of self-discipline and self-training; we are none of us born like that. He must be pretty resilient; teaching makes great demands on nervous energy. And he should be able to take in his stride the innumerable petty irritations any adult dealing with children has to endure.

Finally, I think a teacher should have the kind of mind which always wants to go on learning. Teaching is a job at which one will never be perfect; there is always something more to learn about it. There are three principal objects of study: the subject, or subjects, which the teacher is teaching; the methods by which they can best be taught to the particular pupils in the classes he is teaching; and - by far the most important - the children, young people, or adults to whom they are to be taught. The two cardinal principles of British education today are that education is education of the whole person, and that it is best acquired through full and active co-operation between two persons, the teacher and the learner.

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