



TIPS FOR IMPROVING READING SPEED

As our eyes move across the page they make a series of jerky movements. Whenever they come to rest on a word that is called a fixation. Most people fixate once on each word across a line of print. In order to make our speed increase we must take in more words with each fixation, rather than make our eyes move faster.

1. **Try to avoid focusing on every word, but rather look at groups of 2 to 3 words.** For instance, this sentence could be grouped in this manner:
for instance / this sentence / could be grouped / in this manner '
2. **Work on vocabulary improvement. Familiarize yourself with new words so you don't get stuck on them when you read them again.**
3. **Read more! 15 minutes a day of reading an average size novel equals 18 books a year at an average reading speed!**
4. **Determine your purpose before reading. If you only need main ideas, then allow yourself to skim the material. Don't feel you must read every word.**
5. **Spend a few minutes a day reading at a faster than comfortable rate (about 2 to 3 times faster than your normal speed).** Use your hand or an index card to guide your eyes down the page. Then time yourself reading a few pages at your normal speed. You'll find that often your normal reading speed will increase after your skimming practice.
6. If you have poor concentration when reading, practice reading for only 5 - 10 minutes at a time and gradually increase this time.
7. There are several books on increasing reading speed available in most bookstores. If you are serious about increasing your rate you may want to work systematically through one of these books

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING READING SPEED

Improvement of Reading Rate

It is safe to say that almost anyone can double his speed of reading while maintaining equal or even higher comprehension. In other words, **anyone can improve the speed with which he gets what he wants from his reading.**

The average college student reads between 250 and 350 words per minute on fiction and non-technical materials. A "good" reading speed is around 500 to 700 words per minute, but some people can read a thousand words per minute or even faster on these materials. What makes the difference? **There are three main factors involved in improving reading speed: (1) the desire to improve, (2) the willingness to try new techniques and (3) the motivation to practice. :**

Learning to read rapidly and well presupposes that you have the necessary vocabulary and comprehension skills. When you have advanced on the reading comprehension materials to a level at which you can understand college-level materials, you will be ready to speed reading practice in earnest.

The Role of Speed in the Reading Process

Understanding the role of speed in the reading process is essential. Research has shown a close relation between speed and understanding. For example, in checking progress charts of thousands of individuals taking reading training, it has been found in most cases that an increase in rate has been paralleled by an increase in comprehension, and that where rate has gone down, comprehension has also decreased.

Although there is at present little statistical evidence, it seems that plodding word-by-word analysis (or word reading) inhibits understanding. There is some reason to believe that the factors producing slow reading are also involved in lowered comprehension. Most adults are able to increase their rate of reading considerably and rather quickly without lowering comprehension. These same individuals seldom show an increase in comprehension when they reduce their rate. In other cases, **comprehension is actually better at higher rates of speed.** Such results, of course, are heavily dependent upon the method used to gain the increased rate. Simply reading more rapidly without actual improvement in basic reading habits usually results in lowered comprehension.

Factors that Reduce Reading Rate

Some of the facts which reduce reading rate: (a) limited perceptual span i.e., word-by-word reading; (b) slow perceptual reaction time, i.e., slowness of recognition and response to the material; (c) vocalization, including the need to vocalize in order to achieve comprehension; (d) faulty eye movements, including inaccuracy in placement of the page, in return sweep, in rhythm and regularity of movement, etc.; (e) regression, both habitual and as associated with habits of concentration; (f) faulty habits of attention and concentration, beginning with simple inattention during the reading act and faulty processes of retention; (g) lack of practice in reading, due simply to the fact that the person has read very little and has limited reading interests so that very little reading is practiced in the daily or weekly schedule; (h) fear of losing comprehension, causing the person to suppress his rate deliberately in the firm belief that comprehension is improved if he spends more time on the individual words; (i) habitual slow reading, in which the person cannot read faster because he has always read slowly, (j) poor evaluation of which aspects are important and which are unimportant; and (k) the effort to remember everything rather than to remember selectively.

Since these conditions act also to reduce comprehension increasing the reading rate through eliminating them is likely to result in increased comprehension as well. This is an entirely different matter from simply speeding up the rate of reading without reference to the conditions responsible for the slow rate. In fact, simply speeding the rate especially through forced acceleration, may actually result, and often does, in making the real reading problem more severe. In addition, forced acceleration may even destroy confidence in ability to read. The obvious solution then is to increase rate as a part of a total improvement of the whole reading process. This is a function of special training programs in reading.

Basic Conditions for Increased Reading Rate

A well planned program prepares for maximum increase in rate by establishing the necessary conditions. Four basic conditions include:

1. **Have your eyes checked.** Before embarking on a speed reading program, make sure that any correctable eye defects you may have are taken care of by checking with your eye doctor. Often, very slow reading is related to uncorrected eye defects.
2. **Eliminate the habit of pronouncing words as you read.** If you sound out words in your throat or whisper them, you can read slightly only as fast as you can read aloud. You should be able to read most materials at least two or three times faster silently than orally. If you are aware of sounding or "hearing" words as you read, try to concentrate on key words and meaningful ideas as you force yourself to read faster.
3. **Avoid regressing (rereading).** The average student reading at 250 words per minute regresses or rereads about 20 times per page. Rereading words and phrases is a habit which will slow your reading speed down to a snail's pace.

Usually, it is unnecessary to reread words, for the ideas you want are explained and elaborated more fully in later contexts. Furthermore, the slowest reader usually regresses most frequently. Because he reads slowly, his mind has time to wander and his rereading reflects both his inability to concentrate and his lack of confidence in his comprehension skills.

4. Develop a wider eye-span. This will help you read more than one word at a glance. Since written material is less meaningful if read word by word, this will help you learn to read by phrases or thought units.

Rate Adjustment

Poor results are inevitable if the reader attempts to use the same rate indiscriminately for all types of material and for all reading purposes. He must learn to adjust his rate to his purpose in reading and to the difficulty of the material he is reading. This ranges from a maximum rate on easy, familiar, interesting material or in reading to gather information on a particular point, to minimal rate on material which is unfamiliar in content and language structure or which must be thoroughly digested. The effective reader adjusts his rate; the ineffective reader uses the same rate for all types of material.

Rate adjustment may be overall adjustment to the article as a whole, or internal adjustment within the article. Overall adjustment establishes the basic rate at which the total article is read; internal adjustment involves the necessary variations in rate for each varied part of the material. As an analogy, you plan to take a 100-mile mountain trip. Since this will be a relatively hard drive with hills, curves, and a mountain pass, you decide to take three hours for the total trip, averaging about 35 miles an hour. This is your overall rate adjustment. However, in actual driving you may slow down to no more than 15 miles per hour on some curves and hills, while speeding up to 50 miles per hour or more on relatively straight and level sections. This is your internal rate adjustment. There is no set rate, therefore, which the good reader follows inflexibly in reading a particular selection, even though he has set himself an overall rate for the total job.

Overall rate adjustment should be based on your reading plan, your reading purpose, and the nature and difficulty of the material. The reading plan itself should specify the general rate to be used. This is based on the total "size up". It may be helpful **to consider examples of how purpose can act to help determine the rate to be used.** To understand information, skim or scan at a rapid rate. To determine value of material or to read for enjoyment, read rapidly or slowly according to you feeling. **To read analytically, read at a moderate pace to permit interrelating ideas. The nature and difficulty of the material requires an adjustment in rate in conformity with your ability to handle that type of material.** Obviously, level of difficulty is highly relative to the particular reader. While Einstein's theories may be extremely difficult to most laymen, they may be very simple and clear to a professor of physics. Hence, the layman and the physics professor must make a different rate adjustment in reading the same material. **Generally, difficult material will entail a slower rate; simpler material will permit a faster rate.**

Internal rate adjustment involves selecting differing rates for parts of a given article. In general, decrease speed when you find the following (1) unfamiliar terminology not clear in context. Try to understand it in context at that point; otherwise, read on and return to it later; (2) difficult sentence and paragraph structure; slow down enough to enable you to untangle them and get accurate context for the passage; (3) unfamiliar or abstract concepts. Look for applications or examples of your own as well as studying those of the writer. Take enough time to get them clearly in mind; (4) detailed, technical material. This includes complicated directions, statements of difficult principles, materials on which you have scant background; (5) material on which you want detailed retention.

In general, increase speed when you meet the following: (a) simple material with few ideas which are new to you; move rapidly over the familiar ones; spend most of your time on the unfamiliar ideas; (b) unnecessary examples and illustrations. Since these are included to clarify ideas, move over them rapidly when they are not needed; (c) detailed explanation and idea elaboration which you do not need, (d) broad, generalized ideas and ideas which are restatements of previous ones. These can be readily grasped, even with scan techniques.

In keeping your reading attack flexible, adjust your rate sensitivity from article to article. It is equally important to

adjust your rate within a given article. Practice these techniques until a flexible reading rate becomes second nature to you.

Summary

In summary, evidence has been cited which seems to indicate a need for and value of a rapid rate of reading, while at the same time indicating the dangers of speed in reading, as such. **We have attempted to point out the relationship between rate of reading and extent of comprehension, as well as the necessity for adjustment of reading rate, along with whole reading attack, to the type of material and the purposes of the reader.**

Finally, the factors which reduce rate were surveyed as a basis for pointing out that increase in rate should come in conjunction with the elimination of these retarding aspects of the reading process and as a part of an overall reading training program where increase in rate is carefully prepared for in the training sequence.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR READING SPEED

The purpose of this section is to teach you how to increase your reading speed. Shortly we will be adding a section for reading BETTER as opposed to FASTER.

We all have a capacity for reading much faster than we typically do. Our reading speed changes as we go through life. When we are in high school, we go through about two hundred words a minute. We get to college and, because we have to read faster due to more time constraints and a much greater amount to read, we read faster. Most people in college average about 400 words per minute. Then we get out of college, and now we don't have to read so fast. There are no longer time constraints, and we can read slow and easy. We find ourselves dropping back down to about 200 words per minute.

Think of reading like you do a muscle, the more you read, the better you get at it, the faster you're going to read. And we have a great capacity for reading faster. We aren't even scraping the surface of how fast we can read. You see, we have 1,000,000,000,000 brain cells. In fact, the inner connections, the synapses, in our mind are virtually infinite. It has been estimated by a Russian scientist that the number of synapses we have would be one followed by 10 million kilometers of zeros. Our physical capacity for reading is beyond our comprehension. Our visual unit has the capability to take in a full page of text in 1/20 of a second. If we could turn the pages fast enough, our brain could process it faster than our eyes can see it. If we could turn those pages fast enough, our eyes have the capacity to read a standard book in six to twenty-five seconds depending on the length of the book. We could take in the entire Encyclopedia Britannica in one hour. So reading 700 - 1,000 words a minute is easily within our reach.

The key to improving our speed is to SIGHT READ, and that's what we are going to show you how to do. We are going to start being pure sight readers. Obstacles get in our way, however. What do we mean by obstacles? Well, these are things that impede us from reading faster.

REGRESSIONS are the most wasteful. Regressions are going back over words. You can call it back-skipping if you want. You go back over words you previously read. **People do it for two reasons. Initially we read it to clarify the meaning of what we're reading. We want to be sure of the words we read as we go along.** In our early years in school, when we were first taught - incorrectly - to "read slowly and carefully," it became easy to go back over words.

Well, this not only slows you down, it causes you comprehension problems. For instance, let's say you have a sentence, "The man jumped over the log." Well, if you back-skip, you read that passage like this: "The man jumped," "the man . . . jumped. . . over the log," "jumped over the log." So, what your brain is processing, "The man jumped," "the man jumped," "jumped over the log." Our brain is used to processing our flaws, so the brain thinks, "OK, I know what this clown is saying, 'The man jumped over the log.'" But this takes time to sort out. And it's confusing. Think how much easier it would be if you simply took the sentence in one sight, "The man jumped over the log." There's no confusion there. Then you move on to the next phrase. Regressing or back-skipping is the most harmful thing we do

to slow our reading speed.

Our second obstacle is that we have BAD HABITS that we pick up. Bad habits manifest themselves in a number of ways. For one, you've got people who have MOTOR habits as they read. These are the people who are tapping a pencil when they read, tapping a foot when they read, moving a book, flicking their hand, etc. If they're sitting next to you, they drive you nuts. But they are the people who have to be moving while they read.

Some may even move their lips. If they do that, they're kind of edging over into another bad habit where we find AUDITORY readers. This is the bad habit that we have that is the hardest to drop. Auditory reading is difficult to beat because we are used to reading and hearing the words in our minds. Some people even go so far as to mumble the words. You can see their lips moving sometimes, or you can even hear a guttural growl as they go through the words.

The other obstacle are the FIXATIONS. Fixations are the actual stops or pauses between eye-spans when the eye is moving to its next fixation point. We can't see while the eye moves so you do need the fixation points to see. The problem is, most people fixate word by word by word. They stop their eyes on each separate word. The fixations slow you down because you are stopping on each word.)

The problem that comes up here is this that, like the other obstacles, it impedes concentration and comprehension as well. **The paradox with reading slowly is that it really hurts your concentration.**

Research has shown a close relation between speed and understanding. In checking progress charts of thousands of individuals taking reading training, it's been found that in the vast majority of cases, that an increase in speed reading rate has also been paralleled by an increase in comprehension. The plodding word by word analyzation actually reduces comprehension.

In this day and age, **our brains are used to constant stimulation.** Television, radio, even people talking to you, provide constant stimulation. So when we are reading along slowly and carefully, it's kind of like watching a movie and we encounter a slow motion scene. The slow motion scene is kind of interesting at first because the movie has been moving along at a rapid clip and now we have a change of pace. We've got the slow motion scene of the guy getting shot or the couple running across to each other across a field, and the mind initially says, "Oh, this is cool. This is something different." After a while we get a little impatient and we're ready for the guy who got shot to hit the ground, or the couple who are running across the field to finally get to each other. We start thinking about other things..we've lost our focus on the movie.

The brain does the same thing when we read. The brain is getting all the stimulation it normally gets, then we hit this patch where you're reading slowly. And boom, the brain says, "I don't like this. I think I'm going to start thinking about something else." And the reader starts thinking about the date they had Saturday night or the date they hope to have Saturday night. And therefore, you've got another impediment to comprehending the reading correctly.

OK, what do we do? Well, there are several things we are going to do to increase reading speed. First of all. we are going to increase the **EYE SPAN**. Eye span is the number of words that you take in as you look at the words. In other words, if my eye span is just one word, I am going to move from word to word to word. If my eye span is two words, I am going to move along twice as fast. If my eye span is three words, three times as fast. If I am moving along in phrases, I'm flying along pretty good.

That's where you increase the rate of eye span. You also want to learn to work in THOUGHT UNITS. Thought units help you move faster. This is where you group the words according to context. For instance, let's say you have, "He said something." It's easy to put that in a phrase, then you move to the next phrase. If I had this sentence, "It's safe to say that almost anyone can double his speed of reading while maintaining equal or higher comprehension." If I want to read that in phrases, "It's safe to say that almost anyone.....can double his speed.....of reading while maintaining.....equal or even higher comprehension." You move much faster that way.

So, we are going to increase the number of words we see and we are going to group them according to context. One of the key things that we are also going to work on is RETURN EYE SWEEP. When you get to the end of the sentence or the end of the line on the written page, if your eye meanders back to the other side, you have a chance to pick up words. If you're picking up words and you're sight reading, that can be confusing. So you want to dramatically, quickly, forcefully, go from the end of one line to the beginning of the next one. Using a fingertip or pen as a pointer is a great way to quickly and directly to the next line.

The other thing that helps us increase our speed is **CONFIGURATION**. **As you read faster and faster, you've got to learn to rely on your increased recognition of how words are configured, how they look, as you do it.** In other words, "material" looks different than "response". "Recognition" looks different than "perceptual". The words have visual configurations. **As you learn to read faster and faster you learn to pick up on the configurations and, as you do better and better, your skills at this improve with practice.**

So, we are going to have no REGRESSIONS, no VOCALIZATIONS, and increased EYE SPAN. That's the way to true sight reading. How do we do this?

First, we avoid the problem areas. We avoid the limited eye-span by expanding the number of words that we take in. We get rid of regressions and we get rid of the return eye sweep problem by using a pointer. You can use a pen, a pencil, even your finger. That gives you a point of focus for your eyes. It helps you focus on the page, and you move faster because you can dictate how fast you are moving across the page. Your eye will follow your finger, or pen, or pencil.

Absolutely stay away from the vocalizations. You have got to be a sight reader. You have got to read fast enough so that you don't have time to hear the words. This way you are comprehending simply with your eyes.

You also need to keep in mind that you don't always read at the same speed. If you've got a car that will go 120 miles per hour, you're not going to drive that car 120 miles per hour in a shopping center. You'd get killed and get a heck of a ticket. But you may, on a highway when you are passing a car, get it up to a high speed. When you are in that shopping center, you are going to be driving about 30 miles per hour.

It's the same thing with reading. This is specifically addressed in our Better Reading section. But you must learn that you speed read in certain areas and there are other areas that may be particularly dense, that may have something that's particularly confusing to you, when you will need to slow down and read in shorter phrases, smaller groupings of words so that you can comprehend it clearly. It may be a particularly dense passage where each word has great deal of meaning. It may be even an unusual or specific word.

Let's look at what we've got to do to practice it. The big step here is to simply read faster. It sounds like such a simple statement, it almost sounds stupid. But it's what you have to do. You have to focus on "I'm going to read faster," first.

Comprehension comes later. Practice reading without a great concern for comprehension. In clinical terms, we call this the comprehension lag. It takes the mind as many as ten to fifteen days to adapt to the new reading rate.

You are going to go through periods, practice periods, you can't use on school books, but it's a practice period where you are simply adapting to reading that much faster. Comprehension lags for a while but when it catches up it makes a stunning difference.

A good place to practice this is magazines or newspapers. They have narrow columns that almost make a perfect thought unit. You can almost go straight down the column, taking that finger and putting it in the middle of the column and moving it straight down the page. **You will be stunned how soon** you will be able to improve and comprehend what you are reading that way. You find that it's quick. It's easy reading.