

TIPS FOR INCREASING 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. If you find yourself moving your lips when reading, force yourself to read faster by following (1.) above so that you can no longer move your lips.
4. Read more! 15 minutes a day of reading an average size novel equals 18 books a year at an average reading speed!
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. If you have poor concentration when reading, practice reading for only 5 - 10 minutes at a time and gradually increase this time.
8. 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 a-1 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.

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