

Guidelines for Increasing Reading Speed and Effectiveness

www.utexas.edu/student/utlc

CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Slow, word-by-word, analytical reading is an essential part of some reading tasks. Often, though, when time is limited, the reader must be able to switch gears to absorb the ideas and information at more rapid speeds. By no means should this high-level speed reading be interpreted as applicable to all types of reading situations. Its development will, however, enable the mature reader to add an additional dimension to his/her reading skills.

THE CAUSES OF SLOW READING

1. **Individual variables** -- intelligence, motivation, physiological and psychological traits.
2. Deficiencies in **vocabulary and comprehension** levels required by the particular reading material. A student who is hampered by an inadequate vocabulary or who has difficulty understanding the reading will not benefit by learning to move any faster through unknown or vaguely defined words.
3. The following are the most frequent causes of unnecessarily slow speeds when the factors listed in numbers 1 and 2 above are at adequate levels:
 - **Inflexibility** -- the tendency to read everything the same way regardless of what it is, why it is being read, etc.
 - **Passivity** -- the failure to become engaged in the material being read, the failure to interact with the author and to anticipate his next thought, his conclusions, etc.
 - Unnecessary and habitual re-reading or **regression**, due to a lack of concentration.
 - **Habitually slow reaction time** to reading material -- slowness in interpreting what is read which can initially make attempts at reading faster very uncomfortable.

WHERE TO BEGIN WITH YOUR NEXT READING ASSIGNMENT

1. Be **flexible**. Difficulty and purpose determine **how** to read a selection. College students (especially) must realize that there are reading **speeds**, not just one reading speed. Speeds must vary with the nature of the reading task and the reader's familiarity with the materials.
2. Determine the **purpose** for reading this particular selection. What type of information do you have to learn from it? How long do you have to retain the information? How does this selection fit into the whole course? Why has this reading been assigned? What will be the use of this information?
3. **Preview** the selection to determine its difficulty. How familiar are you with this field of study? How many unknown and essential words are in it? Read the introduction, subheads, italicized sentences, marginal notes, and conclusion. Try to grasp the general thought structure by integrating these diverse clues.

Guidelines for Increasing Reading Speed and Effectiveness

www.utexas.edu/student/utlc

4. Read.

- Make use of the **head start** that you got during your preview.
- Read for **ideas** and concepts, not for isolated words. Pace yourself fast enough in order to read the concepts, not just the words.
- Concentrate. If you push your rate up to capacity, you won't have time to think about other things. Set reasonable but strict **time goals** and keep track of the time.
- Think, interpret, analyze the **first** time you read; avoid unnecessary re-reading.
- Note **key words** (subjects, verbs, objects) and **telegraph** the message to yourself.
- **Pace yourself**; read as fast as your purpose will permit. Pacing discourages the tendency toward habitual and unnecessary re-reading and helps keep your attention focused on the page. Try one of the **self-pacing methods** listed below. It may seem uncomfortable and unnatural at first, but the result is effective once you become accustomed to it.
 - a) Use an index card, a ruler, or any other straight-edge and move it rapidly down the page as you read. Move it lightly, fluidly, with one hand only. Move it either ahead of you down the page to act as a pace-setter **or** let it fall along behind you, covering up what you have read and therefore focusing your concentration.
 - b) Move the edge of your hand or the spread fingers of your hand down the page, reading the lines as they appear from underneath your hand.
 - c) Move your finger or pencil point lightly down the margin beside the lines you are reading.

5. **Stretch** when your momentum seems to be slowing down. Stop, close your eyes and squeeze them together tightly for a second, then open them wide. Play around for a few minutes by pacing yourself through simulated reading of a book held **upside down**, page by page, at extremely rapid speeds **to get the feel of** rapid, rhythmic movement down the page again. With a new momentum established, turn the book right side up and continue reading at your fastest possible speed.

6. **Test** yourself. Stop at the end of each section of material to **recall** what you have just read. For material which must be remembered for a longer period of time, practice reading quickly and efficiently with the **intent to recall** the important information at the end of each chapter or section or paragraph (depending upon the difficulty of the material). Make notes or underline if appropriate.