

## INCREASING READING SPEED

There are no quick tips for increasing reading speed. To read quickly while still comprehending and retaining information is a skill that takes time and practice to develop. By using these simple strategies, however, your reading speed will increase over time, developing your skills as a more effective and efficient reader.

### HOW WE READ

To improve reading speed, it's important to know what reading actually looks like. Watch a friend's eyes as they read: you will notice that rather than move smoothly from left to right, their eyes skip intermittently as they focus on different things. This is a motion called *saccades*. Saccadic movement allows us to take in more of a visual image; instead of focusing on a single thing, we use quick movements and our peripheral vision to get a full picture. Generally this movement is involuntary and reflexive; we don't usually think about what our eyes are doing.

Eye movement pauses briefly on points called *fixations*: these are the images on which our eyes focus. The focus usually lasts for less than half a second while our brain processes the image. If it's something new, our brain works harder and slower to process the image; if we recognize and understand the image, our brain works faster. As we read, our brain processes the images (letters, words, sentences) and combines them with memory to make meaning out of the text.

Faster readers take in more words at one time; they also spend less time fixated on each point. This is often due to increased vocabulary and word recognition. Faster readers don't read every word, or even every sentence; they use background knowledge, memory and understanding to fill in the gaps, while also anticipating what will come next.

While many speed-reading programs might teach you to read faster (or at least move your eyes faster), it is not easy to increase reading speed while also maintaining comprehension. However, the more you read, the greater your vocabulary and the more background knowledge you have, the more skilled you will be as a reader.

### STRATEGIES

#### Before reading, identify your purpose

The speed at which you read usually depends on why we're reading. If we are just skimming or reading for fun, we'll often read quickly, not taking in every word or even every line; reading for comprehension, learning or memorization will involve increasingly slower speeds. You can use the following chart as a general guideline:

# ACADEMIC

| Purpose                       | Reading Speed        |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Get the gist                  | Very rapidly         |
| Understand general ideas      | Fairly rapidly       |
| Locate specific information   | Skim or scan rapidly |
| Determine value of material   | Skim rapidly         |
| Pre-read or post-read         | Scan fairly rapidly  |
| Build general background      | Rapidly              |
| Get and retain detailed facts | Moderate rate        |
| Comprehend difficult concepts | Slowly               |
| Read for enjoyment            | Your choice!         |

## Try to avoid looking at every single word

Because our periphery vision takes in more words as we read, we don't need to focus on every word. It will be more efficient and effective to focus on groups of 2-3 words. For example, the following sentence could be divided into groups of words that will not negatively affect understanding:

Reading fast/ can contribute to/ academic success/ at university

Some students also skip words. While this technique takes practice, eventually your periphery vision will work with your brain to fill in the gaps, leading to a faster reading speed.

## Use your finger

To prevent yourself from getting lost in the text and having to reread passages, use your finger to guide your eyes as you move through the reading. This will save you from wasting time.

## Expand your vocabulary

The most skilled readers have large vocabularies and background knowledge. Take note of words that you have frequent difficulty understanding and familiarize yourself with them so they don't slow down your reading. Before you start reading, skim the text or read a summary so you have an idea of what to expect.

## Try to avoid moving your lips when reading

Moving your lips will actually reduce your reading speed because you are reading every word. This is helpful when trying to memorize or thoroughly learn from a text, but if your goal is to skim or just comprehend the information you can read chunks of words instead.

## Practice makes perfect!

The more you read, the faster you will be. Spend 15 minutes each day reading for pleasure; doing so will go a long way toward a faster reading speed.

# ACADEMIC

---

## Train your brain

Spend a few minutes each day reading at a faster rate to develop your potential. It could be 2 to 3 times faster than your normal speed, as long as you still understand the text. Use your fingers to guide you down the pages. If your comprehension is sacrificed, reduce your speed to one that still challenges you.

## Increase concentration

If you can't concentrate for a long time when reading, start by reading for only 5 to 10 minutes at a time. Then gradually increase the time span until your endurance is longer.

## REFERENCES

Dartmouth College (2013). Vary reading rate. Retrieved from <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/reading.html>

Den Buurman, R., Roersema, T., & Gerrissen, J. F. (1981). Eye movements and the perceptual span in reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16(2), 227-235.

Sereno, S. C. & Rayner, K. (2003). Measuring word recognition in reading: Eye movements and event-related potentials. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences*, 7(11), 489-493.

Taylor, S. E. (1965). Eye movements in reading: Facts and fallacies. *American Education Research Journal*, 2(4), 187-202.

University of Toronto (n.d.). Tips on increasing reading speed. Retrieved from <http://www.asc.utoronto.ca/getattachment/Handouts/Tips-on-Increasing-Reading-Speed-300-dpi.pdf.aspx>