

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR READING SPEED



Improvement of Reading Rate

It is safe to say that almost anyone can double their speed of reading while maintaining equal or even higher comprehension. In other words, anyone can improve the speed with which they get what they want from their reading. Learning to read rapidly and well presupposes that you have the necessary vocabulary and comprehension skills.

The average high school student reads about 200 words per minute on fiction and non-technical materials compared to the average college student who reads at about 300 words per minute. 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.

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. In checking progress charts of thousands of individuals taking reading training, it has been found that an increase in rate has been paralleled by an increase in comprehension, and that where rate has gone down, comprehension has also decreased. 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 is not enough to increase a person’s comprehension.

Factors that Reduce Reading Rate

Facts which reduce reading rate:

- ❖ Limited perceptual span, i.e., word-by-word reading.
- ❖ Slow perceptual reaction time, i.e., slowness of recognition to the material.
- ❖ Vocalization; the need to vocalize in order to achieve comprehension.
- ❖ Faulty eye movements, i.e., inaccuracy in placement on page, rhythm, etc.
- ❖ Regression; rereading both habitually and as associated with concentration.
- ❖ Faulty habits of attention and concentration; beginning with simple inattention during the reading act and faulty processes of retention.
- ❖ Lack of practice in reading; reads very little or has limited reading interests.
- ❖ Fear of losing comprehension; causes a person to slow down their rate deliberately in the firm belief that comprehension is improved if they spend more time on the individual words.
- ❖ Habitual slow reading; a person believes they cannot read faster because they have always read slowly.
- ❖ Poor evaluation of which aspects are important and which are unimportant.
- ❖ The effort to remember everything rather than to remember selectively.

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. The obvious solution, then is to increase the rate as a part of a total improvement of the whole reading process.

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:

- Have your eyes checked.
- Eliminate the habit of pronouncing words as you read; most people can read material at least two or three times faster silently than orally.
- Avoid regressing or rereading; the average student reading at 250 words per minute regresses or rereads about 20 times per page.
- 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.

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. They must learn to adjust their rate to their purpose in reading and to the difficulty of the material they are reading.

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. Overall rate adjustment should be based on your reading plan, your reading purpose, and the nature and difficulty of the material. Internal rate adjustment involves selecting differing rates for parts of a given article.

Decrease your reading rate when you find the following:

- ❑ Unfamiliar terminology.
- ❑ Difficult sentence and paragraph structure.
- ❑ Unfamiliar or abstract concepts.
- ❑ Detailed, technical material.
- ❑ Material on which you want detailed retention.

Increase your reading rate when you find the following:

- ❑ Simple material with few ideas which are new to you.
- ❑ Unnecessary example and illustrations.
- ❑ Detailed explanation and idea elaboration which you do not need.
- ❑ Broad, generalized ideas and ideas which are restatements of previous ones.

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.