

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING SPEED AND EFFECTIVENESS OF READING

CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Slow, word-by-word analytical reading is an essential part of some reading tasks. Often, however, when time demands and purpose permits, the reader must possess the capacity to “switch gears” — i.e., to absorb the ideas and information in books 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 the scope of his/her current reading skills.

CAUSES OF SLOW READING SPEEDS

- Individual variables — intelligence, motivation, physiological and psychological traits.
- Deficiencies in vocabulary and comprehension levels required by the particular reading material. A student who has difficulty understanding what he/she reads will not be helped by learning to misunderstand faster. A student who is hampered by an inadequate vocabulary will not be helped by learning to skip any faster through unknown or vaguely defined words.
- Most frequent causes of unnecessarily slow speeds when the causes listed in A and B 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 involved with the material being read, the failure to interact with the author and to anticipate his next thought, his conclusions, etc.
 - Unnecessary and habitual regression or re-reading — because of lack of concentration.
 - Habitually slow “reaction time” to reading material — a general “rut” which makes attempts at faster reading extremely uncomfortable at first.

WHERE TO BEGIN ... with your next reading assignment.

- 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.
- Determine **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? ... To what use will the information be put?
- **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 isolated clues.

- **READ**

- Make use of the head-start you got during your preview.
- Read for ideas and concepts, not for isolated words. Pace yourself fast enough that you have to read concepts ... not words.
- Concentrate — if you push your rate up to capacity, you won't have time to think about other things. Set reasonable but stiff time goals and race the clock.
- Think, interpret, analyze the **FIRST** time you read — avoid unnecessary re-reading.
- Note key words (subjects, verbs, objects) — **TELEGRAPH** the message to yourself.
- Pace yourself — as fast as your purpose will permit. Pacing will discourage the tendency toward habitual and unnecessary re-reading and helps to keep your attention focused on the page. Try one of the **SELF-PACING METHODS** listed below ... perhaps uncomfortable and unnatural at first, but most effective after the “newness” wears off.
 - 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 forcing your initial concentration.
 - Move the edge of your hand or the spread fingers of your hand down the page, reading the lines as they pop up from underneath your hand.
 - Move your finger or pencil point lightly down the margin beside the lines you are reading.
- **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 **JUST TO GET THE FEEL OF** rapid, rhythmic movement down the page again. With new momentum established, turn the book right-side up and continue reading at your fastest possible speed.
- **TEST** yourself. Stop at the end of each “section” of material and recall periodically what you have just read. Especially in material which you must remember for a 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.