

Skimming, scanning

Both skimming and scanning are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading.

When skimming, we go through the reading material quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer.

When scanning, we only try to locate specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to do so. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it be a name, a date, or a less specific piece of information.

Skimming is therefore a more thorough activity which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence. Scanning, on the contrary, is far more limited since it only means retrieving what information is relevant to our purpose. Yet it is usual to make use of these two activities together when reading a given text. For instance, we may well skim through an article first just to know whether it is worth reading, then read it through more carefully because we have decided that it is of our interest. It is also possible afterwards to scan the same article in order to note down a figure or a name which we particularly want to remember.

Excerpted from:

Grellet, Françoise. Developing Reading Skills. Cambridge: CUP, 1999, pp. 19