

Speed reading

Dear students, the following module will give you basic information on the technique of effective reading and speed reading. Speed reading is a technique which can help you read the same or a larger amount of information faster without reducing comprehension. However, the mere reading of this module is not enough. You will have to practise and, if possible, borrow a book. The time you invest in practice will pay off though!

Key concepts

Speed reading, turbo reading... - selective reading during which you read at least 240 words/minute with a minimum of 60% comprehension.

Effective reading - an ability to reach a set goal via reading, while being able to switch between various options.

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1. Speed reading

You surely know this. A new semester begins and you have tons of compulsory literature. How does it end? Towards the end of the semester, you try to read everything, everything is messed up and you know nothing in the end, since you focus on many other duties while reading and do not relax.

In this module we would like to show you that it is possible to read effectively and also faster. No more sleepless nights; all you have to do is adopt a few simple pieces of advice and practise reading. In fact, we will sort of return to the first grade, in which you learned to read. It was there that everything began, and it was also there that everything might have gone wrong. You learned to read one letter after another, and therefore you read slowly now. You have adopted a bad habit.

In order for your reading to be effective as well as fast, we will give you advice on how to get the most out of the tons of books your teachers usually assign you to read. Remember effective time management (see module Time management); if you plan your reading for the whole course of the semester, you will manage it much better. And now let us begin.



A tip for a start! Before you start studying, try a small test.

Before you read the materials, try what your reading is like. You can do so by means of two online tests. Unless you try the tests, do not proceed with reading!

Examples:

<http://www.freereadingtest.com/>

http://readerssoft.com/speed_reading_test_outline.php

<http://www.speedreaderxreview.com/free-online-reading-speed-test>

<http://www.execuread.com/online-reading-comprehension-tests.htm>

And now is the high time you learned how you can **improve** your reading skills. Untrained people read with a speed **between 125 and 225 words per minute** (in the case of easy texts). When they start applying the techniques of speed reading, they may achieve an average **speed of 500 words per minute**. After a mere few days of practice, you may read twice or three times as fast.

In order to find various speed reading techniques, search with keywords such as speed reading, turbo reading, supersonic reading, photoReading, quantum reading...

1.1. Definition

David Gruber says on his Czech website (<http://www.gruber.cz>):

Speed reading is a narrower concept than rational reading (see below). It is a perfected kind of perception and mental processing of a text in a situation when the text's difficulty is medium at most (common administration, common e-mails, popularizing magazine articles), and the reading objective is medium as well (to express the main idea, the main opportunities and threats, important details). Speed reading is selective reading with a capacity equal to or above 240 units (that is, for example, with a speed of 400 words per minute and a rate of comprehension of 60 % and above).

We then distinguish rational reading = speed search + speed reading + speed study. It is a set of abilities comprising the text, your eyes and your brain.

2. Speed reading and comprehension

The good news is that a higher speed does not mean a lower level of comprehension; on the contrary, it has been proven that people memorize more during speed reading. The average rate of memorizing is 60%.

David Gruber mentions **33 weapons of the skilled reader** on his website. He divides them into three main categories:

- a. **brain (B)**, i.e. focused on the mental processing of a text,
- b. **optic-technical (OT)**, i.e. focused on the reading technique, mainly on a different eye function,
- c. **mixed (M)**.

We will mention a select few (taken from <http://www.gruber.cz>)

- I. An ability to concentrate on a professional level - every read text is highly interesting.
- II. Determining the objective of reading during preparation.
- III. Mental activity during reading.
- IV. Systematic confrontation of the read text with the objective of reading.
- V. Abandoning reading after having reached its objective. (Trivial, yet frequently not observed.)
- VI. An adequate variety of opinions - an equality of the reader and the author.
- VII. A silent inner dialogue with the author.
- VIII. Optimum working-psychological conditions for reading.
- IX. A right distance between the eyes and the text.
- X. A right angle of the read text.
- XI. A right position of the body (right sitting posture).

- XII.** Reading without body movements.
- XIII.** Reading without articulations.
- XIV.** A wide angle of vision.
- XV.** The eyes are less fixed on the line, hidden regressions are reduced.
- XVI.** The eyes are set on after the beginning of the line, and set off before the end of the line.

Try to sort these weapons into the three above-mentioned categories: brain, optical-technical and mixed. If you do not know, write an e-mail.

3. Difference between normal and speed reading

Speed reading helps you concentrate because you are fully focused on the text and do not have time to think of anything else and jump between thoughts. The ability to concentrate significantly increases with practice.

Try the following simple exercise every day:

Focus your eyes on two objects (e.g. a cup and a pencil) and repeatedly look from one to the other and back again. Ignore everything else, just focus on the chosen object.

After a week, work with more objects. Find out where your limitations are. **After another week, picture the chosen object only in your mind.** Shift between both objects again. And change the sequence of your images. Learn to evoke any image at any time according to your wishes, and to replace it anytime with another image.



ILLUSTRATION: MARK MATCHO

Combine your images then. E.g. the image of a piece of paper and a trash basket will be combined as follows - you will imagine crumpling the paper and throwing it into the trash basket. Then you will imagine dumping the trash and the paper falling into a dustbin.

This is not a primitive and far-fetched exercise; try to avoid such thoughts. They would only hinder your imagination. Remember the first module dealing with creativity blocks. Forget all thoughts hindering your imagination. In time you will learn to work with abstract images and crazy combinations. An example may be e.g. an angry boss and undisturbed peace.

4. Good and bad reading habits

Let us now have a look at bad and good reading habits. Try to say for yourselves what kind of habits you have. And adopt the good ones.

Good habits	Bad habits
<p>Active reading - a good reader is one who reads any text actively. Even a text the content of which does not interest them much. Active readers put questions to the author and quickly find answers to them in the text. They agree enthusiastically, or argue in case their opinions do not match the author's. If they do not get any answer, they quickly realize they should find another book instead.</p>	<p>Passive reading - a bad reader does not concentrate much. They expect the text to become more interesting and that they will find something important in it in time. Such readers do not make full use of their mental capacity, they are not motivated, and the effort made finally outweighs the benefit they get. Avoid this way of reading, as it is very time-consuming and demotivating.</p>
<p>Using various reading techniques - a good reader uses both speed and slower reading according to the situation.</p>	<p>Using only one reading technique - one technique slows reading down and may cause an insufficient comprehension of the text. Adopt various reading techniques and use them.</p>
<p>General orientation in the text - a good reader is able to notice connections fast due to their perception of the text as a whole.</p>	<p>Reading word by word - a bad reader reads word by word, does not perceive broader connections. This may cause them to miss the general message of the text, and it may take them long to understand the context. Do not read word by word; learn to fixate more words at once and later even whole sentences - see the supplementary study material.</p>
<p>Reading without regressions - a good reader fully concentrates on their work, does not unnecessarily think of anything else.</p>	<p>Constant going back in the text - this occurs if the reader does not fully concentrate or find the target they are searching for. Try to avoid moving your eyes back to words and sentences you have already read. Even if you do not really understand what you are reading for the first time, read on. When you finish reading, you will understand the text better after a lapse of time via its general context.</p>
<p>Reading without unnecessary movements - a good reader is relaxed and moves only their eyes. The body posture and the work environment arrangement are in accordance with the rules of ergonomics.</p>	<p>Bad body posture and unnecessary movements - the muscles are stressed and the reader experiences fatigue too early. Among such bad habits are also slow pointing in the text with one's finger, moving one's lips etc. The eyes are the only body part which should move during reading.</p>

Reading in silence - a good reader reads in silence and does not make any sounds.	Reading aloud - a bad reader whispers while reading or reads aloud. Try to get rid of such audible bad habits; they slow you down and hinder your concentration on a given activity.
Objectives of reading determined - a good reader confronts what they have read with their objective on a regular basis. As soon as they reach their objective, they stop reading.	Objectives of reading unknown - a bad reader has no objective, does not know what to look for. They lose their motivation soon and waste their mental capacity. Always determine your objective and accomplish it.

5. Ways of reading

Overview

When you take up a book to read (not fiction), get an overview of the book in 5-8 minutes. Notice its graphic layout, print, paper quality etc., among others. You may thus find out what is important to you and what is not (e.g. what you already know and do not need to read). You will also get a picture about the book's credibility.

Notice the following parts: introduction, foreword, table of contents, chapter titles, headlines, passages highlighted by the author, figure and diagram descriptions, end-of-chapter summaries, conclusion, afterword, appendices, index, book-jacket summary. After you get an overview of the book and what it has to offer, **choose your next step:**

The book **does not contain information which is important to you** - do not deal with it any longer. The book **contains interesting information here and there;** however, you know most of it - proceed with cursoric reading. The book **contains important and essential information** which you need to study - proceed with stataric reading.

Overview

While reading, we use a system of marks and notes where it is essential. We read with a great speed and a wide angle of vision. It is necessary to adopt techniques of expanding the field of vision (see below).

You surely know Pareto's rule. It may be applied even in this case. Remember!

40 essential pages of a 200-page book will bring you 80% benefit and save 80% of your time.

Stataric reading

This way is advisable if the reader wants to study the given text in a deeper manner and embrace it. It is slower than cursoric reading, especially if the text contains new concepts we have to memorize.

While reading, we make notes and use marks. Even if the text is difficult and essential, we do not read with a constant speed; we adjust the speed according to the level of complexity and significance of the given issue. Even in such texts it is enough to go through some pages quickly.

The secret of your success thus lies in learning to switch between reading speeds and practising this.

6. Basic habits for speed reading

Eye movement: Learn to move your eyes over the top half of the letters. Do a small test. Cover the top half of the letters in a text and try to read it. Most likely it will be very difficult. Then cover the bottom half and read. You will probably read nearly fluently. It is so because most important signs are found in the top half. Learn to direct your eyes there, then. **Have a look at an example.**

Expanding the angle of vision

In supplementary materials you will find a scanned text on which you will practise expanding the angle of vision. Print out the text. Select a group of letters or numbers which you will gradually uncover, each time for no longer than 0.3 seconds! Practise this movement beforehand (you have to yank the card a few millimetres down and back, and you must not leave the letters uncovered for a longer moment). **Then you more or less know what you saw. Write this down on the respective line.** Check the results when you finish the column.

Note: It is not your objective to make no mistakes; that would mean you did something wrong or had an easy version. An optimum number of mistakes is 3-5 per column. If you made fewer mistakes, move on to a more difficult exercise; if you made more mistakes, try an easier version.

Fixation

In order to read better, you have to practise fixation as well. An untrained reader needs 7-9 fixations per a 10-word line. **Fixation means stopping the eye movement** (you can probably guess that your eyes do not move without interruption while reading). If you practise, you may achieve 3 fixations per line.

Purposely, I will not give you any practical exercise at this point. This exercise is recommended only after other kinds of practice. If you really want your skills to improve, look at any books about speed reading, and follow his instructions. **The books are available in many libraries.**

7. Summary

In this module we introduced the ways of effective and speed reading.

Effective reading means an ability to orientate in a text and to change the reading speed. Speed reading measures how many characters we manage to read in a certain time unit without the loss of comprehension.

You already know that it is good **to avoid bad habits** while reading. Therefore, do not read using only one technique, forget passive reading and reading word by word, and try to settle in a comfortable position before you start to read.

Remember **stataric and cursoric reading**. It is necessary to be able to switch between the different techniques. **Stataric reading** is intended for a deeper comprehension of the text, you change the speed of reading. **Cursoric reading** rather means perfunctory reading in order to get a grasp. You should have a basic overview of each book before you read it. Go through it and see in what way it is divided.

Gradually **practise expanding the angle of vision**, and in the case of a more profound practice (which pays off though!) proceed according to one of David Gruber's books.

It is not the objective of this module to teach you speed reading within a short while. It is rather a motivation to start practising it. **Set an objective and do not be afraid to start**. Nobody is going to check or evaluate your progress. Why read faster, then? Everybody will find a reason for sure. The main reason will probably be that you will cease to read unnecessary information, manage to read larger quantities of texts, and therefore save time.

Top 10 towards better reading :)

- I. Decide that you want to read faster and more effectively,
- II. Imagine what you may gain by reading faster and more effectively,
- III. Use the advantages which speed reading brings - above all, more free time,
- IV. Read such books and texts that are significant,
- V. Start working on your reading abilities,
- VI. Go through selected books which deal with speed and effective reading, and on a theoretical basis adopt various reading techniques,
- VII. Start practising speed reading,
- VIII. Do not be afraid to make mistakes - learn from them,
- IX. Apply acquired knowledge and experience during each reading session - always choose the right technique and suitable speed,
- X. Try to make progress every day - step by step.