



# Cut your paperwork in half... learn to speed-read

Speed-reading is not going to change your life, but it will help to ease the conflicts of time in your day-to-day school life. Teachers have to do a lot of reading these days, whether virtually or otherwise. Speed-reading will help you to gallop through a policy document, let you select which areas you need to assimilate and then help you to do the assimilation. After all, there is no point in speed-reading if you cannot remember what is needed. It's not difficult to learn, needs no special equipment and YOU will easily double YOUR reading speed in one day. *By Clare Forrest*

## Reading Skills

Reading is a complicated process that enables us to identify, assimilate, integrate and absorb the material we are reading. We read on various levels of concentration and understanding, depending on what we are reading. Good readers change their reading speed as appropriate. Poor readers find this difficult.

### Effective reading involves other skills, especially

- Building up a good vocabulary
- Having a wide general knowledge.
- Knowing how our language is structured
- Being able to retain and recall key ideas

It is safe to say that almost anyone – including most dyslexics – can double their speed of

reading and maintain equal or probably higher comprehension. Reading is about understanding – it is not about retention though there is no doubt that learning to speed read also improves retention – more of this later.

The average person reads between 230 and 250 words per minute (wpm) on fiction and non-technical materials. Only about one percent of the population reads at much above 400 wpm. Speed-readers comfortably read an average report at a thousand words per minute or even faster. 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.
- (3) The motivation to practise.



## Before you start

**Important: Before you begin to read this article, make a note of the time you begin and note it again when you finish.**

“ If you want to become a faster reader then you need to be prepared to practise frequently until you have gained the skill

## The Role of Speed in the Reading Process

Research has shown a close relation between speed and understanding. For example, in checking the progress charts of thousands of individuals carrying out reading training, it has been found that an increase in rate has been paralleled by an increase in comprehension. More importantly perhaps the same studies show that where rate has gone down, comprehension has also decreased. Plodding, word-by-word analysis (or word reading) inhibits understanding.

## Rate Adjustment

Effective readers adjust their reading rate; ineffective readers use the same rate for all types of material. 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.

There is no set rate, therefore, which good readers follow inflexibly in reading a particular selection, even though they have set an overall rate for the total job. Your overall rate adjustment

should be based on your reading plan, your reading purpose, and the nature and difficulty of the material.

## Decrease speed when you find...

- **Unfamiliar terminology** not clear in context. Try to understand it in context at that point; otherwise, read on and return to it later.
- **Difficult sentence and paragraph structure** Slow down enough to enable you to untangle them and get accurate context for the passage.
- **Unfamiliar or abstract concepts** Look for applications or examples of your own as well as studying those of the writer. Take enough time to get them clearly in mind.
- **Detailed, technical material** This includes complicated directions, statements of difficult principles, materials on which you have scant background.

## Increase speed when you meet...

- **Simple materials with few new ideas** – move rapidly over the familiar ones and spend most of your time on the unfamiliar ideas.
- **Unnecessary examples and illustrations.** Since these are included to clarify ideas, move over them rapidly when they are not needed.



## Basic Conditions for Increased Reading Rate

A well-planned programme prepares for maximum increase in rate by establishing the necessary conditions. Four basic conditions include:

- **Have your eyes checked.** Before you embark on a speed-reading programme, make sure that any correctable eye defects you may have are taken care of by checking with your optician. It's important to have your eyes checked every two years.
- **Eliminate the habit of pronouncing words as you read** (sub-vocalisation). If you sound out words in your head you will read only as fast as you can read aloud - which is far slower than your brain can process information. If you are aware of sounding out words force yourself to read faster to stop this habit.
- **Avoid regressing** (re-reading). The average person reading at 250 words per minute regresses or rereads about 20 times per page. Usually, it is unnecessary to reread words, for the ideas you want are explained and elaborated more fully in later contexts. It's important to remember that writers write forward – so if you haven't understood something going backward is unlikely to help you! If you read slowly, your mind will wander since slow reading means you take a long time to become engaged in the story or the argument.
- **Develop a wider eye-span.** This will help you read more than one word at a glance. Since written material is meaningless if read word by word, this will help you learn to read by phrases or thought units. When you finish reading this, try focusing on one word on this page and see how unhelpful it is to understanding what has been written. Writing is about collecting words together to make an idea so the more words we see the more sense we can make of the meaning.
- **Since these conditions act also to reduce comprehension if not corrected, increasing the reading rate through eliminating them will result in increased comprehension as well.**

“ Speed-reading can, quite literally, change your life for the better by giving you more choices

- **Unnecessary detailed explanation** and idea elaboration
- **Restatements** of previous broad, generalised ideas

In keeping your reading approach flexible, adjust your rate sensitivity from type to type. It is equally important to adjust your rate within a given type. Practise these techniques until a flexible reading rate becomes second nature to you.

### Speed Reading

If you want to become a faster reader then you need to be prepared to *practise frequently* until you have gained the skill. Speed-reading is *not* a gimmick. It is a proven technique that, provided it is practised, works.

The eye is never still. It fixes on an object or word momentarily and only 'sees' in that instance. Movement creates a blur. People assume that their eyes move smoothly in a continuous, flowing motion but the eye actually *jumps* from one fixation (stop point) to the next and information is *only* absorbed during these pauses. Dyslexics often have particularly jumpy eye movements, which is why speed-reading usually helps them so much. Taking less time over each fixation – which means taking in more words with each fixation – increases reading speed, whilst maintaining comprehension. Indeed, comprehension is improved because more of the total sense of the passage is taken in at once. Slow readers understand less because they take in a small part of the picture rather than the whole.

**The concept is very simple.**

**We teach people to do two things:**

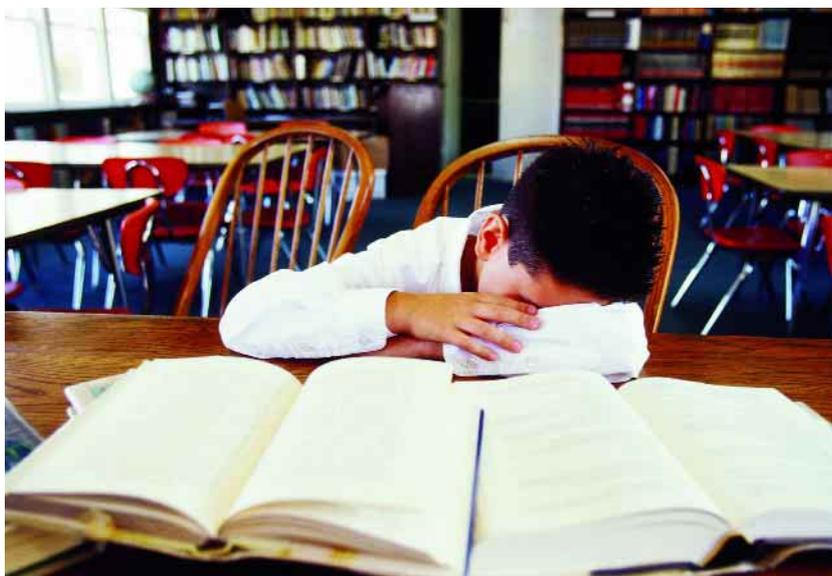
- Widen their visual field by consciously 'seeing' more of the page. Expect to see more and very often you *can* see more.
- Move their eyes more smoothly by using a visual guide such as a forefinger or pen.

These two simple ideas mean that the reader has to move forward across the text, doesn't have the time to sound out words and takes in more information at one time – which is what their brain needs to make sense of the words. It's very simple – and we can teach you how to do it in four hours.

### So why learn to speed read?

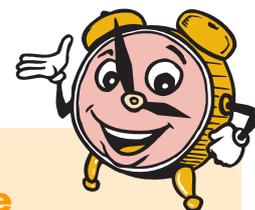
It enables you to make better choices – choices about what's worth keeping and what needs to go into that great filing system we know as the waste bin.

You'll be able to improve retention. You'll be able to read at least twice as fast, (most people



we work with treble or quadruple their speed) and comprehend something better on first reading. Then you can make a new choice, one not available to non- speed readers: You can speed re-read it again if you want to – which will help to fix it in your memory. And, as we all know repetition is a powerful way of exploiting the way our memory works – think about how you learned your alphabet. So speed-reading can, quite literally, change your life for the better by giving you more choices.

**As well as cutting your own workload, why not help your pupils by teaching them to speed read too!**



## NOW – Make a note of the time you have spent reading this article

**There are 1663 words in this article. Divide this by the number of minutes you took to read it and this gives you your wpm reading rate for this type of material. Slow readers read at 200 – wpm, average readers at 230-250 wpm and fast readers at 300 – 400 wpm plus. Speed-readers happily – and effectively – read at 1000 wpm or more. Wouldn't you like to join them?**

## About your author

**Clare Forrest, following a career in operational management and human resources, has been a Training Consultant and Seminar Speaker since 1985, specialising in Management Development, Team Building and Communication Skills. Clare also carries out human resource management tasks for her clients, including running assessment centres and managing individual performance development - coaching and counselling. Clare is also a hypnotherapist and NLP master and works with groups and individuals on anxiety and stress management.**

**Currently a reviewer and columnist for the Training Journal, Clare's many publications include Choosing and Using Training Consultants; Warehouse Management; Time Management for Retailers; Understanding Stress and 20 Training Workshops for Listening Skills. You can contact Clare by e-mail at [info@structuredlearning.com](mailto:info@structuredlearning.com)**