

SHORT NOTES

IMPROVING READING SKILL

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All scientific studies of reading habits show that a reader, no matter how fast or slow he reads, or how much or little he gets from his reading, can improve both his rate and his comprehension. The stark and awful truth is that most of us read slowly, laboriously, and inefficiently. Few people have had the training necessary to make them masters of the skills of reading. Generally we crawl along the printways very slower than an efficient reader. Simply we can improve our reading skill by specifying the purpose of reading. For a rapid, general impression and a surface view of the text just skim. For careful record of facts and specific details, read rapidly with attention to details. But if you wish to understand clearly the more complex organization of the thought, this calls for critical reading. This type of reading is slower and most exacting in its demands for highly developed reading skills.

In general, skimming is basic to most other types of reading. It is the skill that gives the "airplane view" of the printed page. The normal procedure is to begin at the first word of the first paragraph and plod through to the last word in the final paragraph. By so doing, the average adult feels satisfied and congratulates himself upon "having read it all".

The average reader is not aware of paragraph division. Before you begin to read, look down along the left-hand margin of the column of print. To the skilled reader each indentation indicates the beginning of a new thought development. Drive yourself through a chapter in a book, or an article in

a magazine, reading only the first sentence of each paragraph. Before long you will be aware that the thought is flowing smoothly progressively. If the first sentence does not make sense, try the concluding sentence of a paragraph. The main thing is to go on, paragraph after paragraph, like a dragonfly skimming over the surface of a pool.

When you have finished you will be aware of two things first, you will have an overall view of the entire selection which will be as thrilling upon first experience as looking out over an expansive countryside from the cabin of a plane; secondly you will be aware of motion—the onward, and an irresistible surge of thought. Words are merely the symbols through which the thought of the author is transferred to the mind of the reader. The skilled reader always recognizes that the thought flows through the lines of print as a message over a copper wire. The wire indeed is important, but far more so is the thought that it conveys. Read with only one question in the background of your consciousness: Does this make sense? If it does, spur yourself on. More thought lies ahead. Occasionally some writers are difficult to read as they hide "key" sentence in the middle. But writers usually follow a consistent pattern of thought development. The skimming technique may be objected as being very superficial, and so it is. For example, if you read a 40,000-word treatise, you need not give your full attention to each of the 40,000 words. While you see all of them you read only about 20,000 or 25,000. You have sacrificed nothing of the meaning, you have

merely sloughed off the unimportant secrets to reading faster, and more comprehensively.

Always check reading for comprehension, enumerate the points in the order in which the author stated, understand the main idea of the first paragraph, and outline clearly and coherently the thought of the author. Here one should never fall below 80% on any quiz one gives to oneself. The word by word reader brings the thought from the printed page, in dribble. Because of inefficient reading habits the eye of the poor reader has looked at a line of print and has been only a very small fraction of it. The readable area, one sees with a single glance, is the "eye-span". Increased eye-span means greater intake and greater intake manoeuvres more efficient reading.

A simple exercise with the daily newspaper will help you develop increased eye-span. Take any column of newsprint and locate a three or four-letter word in the middle of the line. Beginning from either side of this chosen word, draw straight, diverging lines about four or five inches long with a pen or soft pencil, until the lines widen to column width and touch the printed lines that separate the columns. Now place a card or blotter over the marked area. Fix your eyes on a spot and tear the top of the triangle that you have drawn, pull the card down quickly and push it back into position, allowing about half a second of exposure. What words did you see between the two lines? Now fix your eyes farther down the column that is covered by the card. Repeat the "pull-push" technique. How many words did you see this time? Repeat this again and again. Practise everyday. Soon you will realize that you are gradually seeing more and more at a single glance. Your eye span will be increasing.

There are many other factors in connection with learning to read fast and more comprehensively. One of these is the arresting of the impulse to glance back over the line of print one has just read in order to pick up a word or phrase that one thinks he has missed. Such backward glances are called "regressions". Most of the time they indicate that the reader is not mentally alert, or that he has formed a poor reading habit. For sake of practice, arrest your impulse and drive yourself on. Drive yourself to get, from the oncoming text, its full meaning. Frequently you will find that you did see and comprehend quite adequately what you thought at the instant of the impulse to regress that you had missed.

Reading is an extremely complex visuo-psychological process. The quickest way to improve reading efficiency is to seek the help of a reading centre. But for much of our population these reading centres are not available. Nevertheless, the average adult can improve his reading rate and comprehension through persistent effort and intelligent application of the techniques which have been briefly outlined in this paper.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bond, L.G. 1949. *Teaching the Child to Read*. The MacMillan Co., NY, USA.
- Davidson, D. 1955. *Twenty Lessons in Reading and Writing Prose*. Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, USA.
- McNamee, M.B. 1956. *Reading for Understanding*. Rinehart & Co. Inc., NY, USA.