

The Speed Reading Secret: How Do "They" Read So Fast?



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[Speed Reading Acceleration Secrets](#)

The Speed Reading Secret

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How People Read

Our conscious brain takes in 16 bits of information per second, compared to our non-conscious brain that absorbs 11 million bits per second. Can you imagine the difference? That is the reason why we hate to do things consciously – because it does take effort and discipline. Our non-conscious brain structures process tons of information coming from our sense organs such as breathing, heartbeat, and blood circulation, not to mention instincts and emotions – all without our awareness.

The eyes, our primary tool in reading, *only take in information when they are stopped*. If you want, you can verify this by holding a book up in front of people and let them read a certain part in it. Watch their eyes as they read though don't tell them what you are observing. What feels like continuous motion is actually move → stop → read, move → stop → read, and so on. **Speed readers** minimize the number of stops by maximizing the number of words taken in at each stop.

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A Short Exercise

Here's an exercise that will help you develop effective eye movements. Try looking at the following sentences in three ways:

First, focus your attention: look only at the first "S" in success.

Second, adjust your focus / attention: look to be able to see at the entire word, "success".

Third, adjust your focus so you are seeing three or more words at the same time.

Because you can't say three words at the same time, you can't subvocalize if you are reading three words at a time. Thus, elimination of **vocalization** from thought is necessary. Although many think that verbalization is essential to linking words with concepts, common experience shows that this is not so. For example, if someone asks a mechanic how a car works, he surely knows what to answer but will have a problem in how to respond. The subject of his thought is too complex and multi-dimensional to be expressed in linear forms. He may be able to visualize and manipulate concepts -- and find answers -- to mechanical problems in his mind without ever putting those thoughts into words.

The same is possible with abstract ideas (which are also often highly complex and multi-dimensional), though it takes practice because there are no definite "images" to fall back on. In some cases, especially when the thought involved is quite complex, removing the verbal component not only speeds up the thinking process, but can even lead to intuitive leaps that verbal thinking might have prevented.

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Consider the way in which you are **reading** this text. Most people think that they read the way **young children** do – either letter-by-letter, or at best word-by-word.

The truth is, we do not read letter-by-letter or word-by-word. Instead, we are fixing our eyes on block of words. Notice the way your eye muscles actually move when reading a *printed* text. Try to move your eyes to the next block of words, and go on. Effectively you are not reading words, but blocks of words at a time. The period of time during which the eye rests on one word is called a **fixation**.

You may also notice that you don't always proceed from one block of words to the next. Sometimes, you may move back to a preceding block of words if you are unsure about something or if you don't understand what it meant. These disruptions to the forward flow of reading are called **skip-backs**.

Only **speed readers** have been trained to create mini eye movements, while the rest of us read with micro eye-movements. The former produces speed reading because they engage the peripheral-vision to chunk words simultaneously, not just one-word at a time; while the latter is automatic, and keep adjusting our eyes to place the words we read on our *foveal centralis*, the sharpest focusing area of our retina.

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Pay Attention

Most people read in the same way that they watch television – in an inattentive, passive way. What they should know is that reading takes a lot of effort and you must exert the effort. A wise teacher once told me that you can learn anything if you do three things. That is,

PAY ATTENTION, PAY ATTENTION, and PAY ATTENTION.

Reducing Fixation Time for Speed Reading

The minimum length of time needed for a fixation should only be a quarter of a second. By pushing yourself to minimize the time you take until you reach such rate, you will get better at picking up information from very brief and few fixations. This is a matter of practice and confidence.

Relationship between Rate of Reading and Comprehension

Research shows that there is a big relationship between rate and comprehension. Some people read rapidly and comprehend well; others read slowly and comprehend badly. Thus, there is some reason to believe that the factors producing slow reading are also involved in lowered comprehension.

Good comprehension depends on whether you can extract and retain the important ideas that you've read, not on how fast you read them. If you can do this fast, then your reading speed can be increased. If you pair fast-reading with worrying about comprehension, your reading

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speed will drop because the mind is occupied with your fears; hence, you will not be paying attention to the ideas that you are reading.

However, if you concentrate on the purpose of reading (locating main ideas and finding answers to your questions), your speed and comprehension should increase. Your concern should be not with how fast you can get through a chapter alone, but with how quickly you can comprehend the facts and ideas that you need.

Comprehension during speed reading is easier than during standard reading. This is because the mind is busy looking for meaning, not rereading words and sentences. The average reader spends about 1/6th of the time rereading words than actually reading them. Rereading interrupts the flow of comprehension and slows down the process, that's why the habit of rereading should be eliminated.

How to comprehend easily? Scan the chapter first. Identify the sections to which the author devotes the most amount of space. If there are lots of diagrams for a particular topic, then that must also be an important concept. If you're really under time pressure, you can skip the sections to which the least amount of space is devoted.

Take note on headings and read the first sentence of every paragraph more carefully than the rest of the paragraph. The main idea is usually situated there. Read the important parts and the main ideas. Focus on nouns and main propositions in each sentence. Look for the noun-verb combinations, and focus the mind on these. Then, close the book and ask yourself what you now know about the subject that you didn't know before you started.

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Reducing Skip Backs

Important: Don't reread the same phrases from the text!

Poor readers read and reread the same phrase over and over again. This habit of making "regressions" doubles, or worse triples, reading time and often does not even result in better comprehension. A single careful, attentive speed reading may not be always enough for completely comprehending the matter you are reading, but is often more effective than constant regressions in the middle rate of a reading. It is best to work on paying closer attention and doing a preview first before the careful reading.

To help reduce the number of times that the eyes go back to a previous word or sentence, run a pointer along the line as you read. This could be a finger, a pen, or any pointed material. Your eyes will follow the tip of your pointer, smoothing the flow of speed reading. The speed at which you read using this method will largely depend on the speed at which you move the pointer; so if you want to speed up your reading, you also have to increase your pointing rate.

For the full story on becoming a true speed reading expert, don't hesitate to find out more about our full guide at:

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