

The Speed Reading Course



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The Speed Reading Course

Introduction

We all learn to read at school, after a fashion. But for most of us, this is not an optimal use of our brain power. In this course you will learn to better use the left brain's focused attention combined with the right brain's peripheral attention, in close harmony. Good communication between the brain hemispheres is a pre-requisite for creative thinking and also a sense of well-being, where thoughts and feelings are integrated.

As you probably expect, this course will also teach you to read much faster and at the same time, to remember more of what you have read. These are obviously great advantages.

There is another major benefit. Most of us, as we read, 'speak' the words in our heads. It is this subvocalisation that holds back fast reading and it is unnecessary. It is possible to have an inner speech, a kind of 'thought awareness,' that isn't linked to the tongue, mouth and vocal chord muscles, and this is much faster and more fluent. Cutting out the identification of vocalisation and the stream of thought gives a surprising by-product. Many of us think that our constant subvocalised 'speaking voice' is who we are. Finding out that you can think and be aware without a vocal stream of words, opens up your consciousness to the usually unrecognised domain of intuition and spiritual awareness. You'll have a better sense of who you really are. Try it and see!

The Definition of Reading

Reading may be defined as an individual's total inter-relationship with symbolic information. Reading is a communication process requiring a series of skills. As such reading is a thinking process rather than an exercise in eye movements. Effective reading requires a logical sequence of thinking or thought patterns, and these thought patterns require practice to set them into the mind. They may be broken down into the following seven basic processes:

1. Recognition: the reader's knowledge of the alphabetic symbols.
2. Assimilation: the physical process of perception and scanning.
3. Intra-integration: basic understanding derived from the reading material itself, with minimum dependence on past experience, other than a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

4. Extra-integration: analysis, criticism, appreciation, selection & rejection. These are all activities which require the reader to bring his past experience to bear on the task.
5. Retention: this is the capacity to store the information in memory.
6. Recall: the ability to recover the information from memory storage.
7. Communication: this represents the application of the information and may be further broken down into at least 4 categories, which are:
 - * Written communication;
 - * Spoken communication;
 - * Communication through drawing and the manipulation of objects;
 - * Thinking, which is another word for communication with the self.

Many problems in reading and learning are due to old habits. Many people are still reading in the way that they were taught in elementary school. Their reading speed will have settled to about 250 w.p.m. Many people can think at rates of 500 w.p.m. or more, so their mind is running at twice the speed of their eyes. A consequence is that it is easy to lapse into boredom, day-dreaming or thinking about what you want to do on the weekend. Frequently, it is through this type of distraction that you find you have to re-read sentences and paragraphs, and you find as a result, ideas are difficult to understand and remember.

The basic problem - the mismatch between thinking speed and reading speed - arises for the most part from the inadequate methods by which reading is taught. Since the War there have been two main approaches: the Look-Say method and the Phonic method. Both methods are only semi-effective. In the Phonic method a child is first taught the alphabet, then the different sounds for each of the letters, then the blending of sounds and finally, the blending of sounds which form words. This method works best with children who are left-brain dominant. In contrast, the Look-Say method works best with children who are right-brain dominant. It teaches a child to read by presenting him with cards on which there are pictures of objects, the names of which are printed clearly underneath. By using this method a basic vocabulary is built up, much in the manner of learning to read Chinese. When a child has built up enough basic vocabulary, he progresses through a series of graded books similar to those for the child taught by the Phonic method, and eventually becomes a silent reader. In neither of the above cases is a child taught how to read quickly and with maximum comprehension and recall. An effective reader has usually discovered these techniques all by himself.

Neither the Look-Say method nor the Phonic method, either in isolation or in combination, are adequate for teaching an individual to read in the complete

sense of the word. Both these methods are designed to cover the first stage of reading, the stage of recognition, with some attempt at assimilation and intra-integration, but children are given little help on how to comprehend and integrate the material properly, nor on how to ensure it is remembered. The methods currently used in schools do not touch on the problems of speed, retention, recall, selection, rejection, concentration and note taking, and indeed all those skills which can be described as advanced reading techniques.

In short, most of your reading problems have not been dealt with during your initial education. By using appropriate techniques, the limitations of early education can be overcome and reading ability improved by 500% or more. For example, skipping back over words can be eliminated as 90% of back-skipping is unnecessary for understanding. The 10% of words that do need to be reconsidered are probably words which need to be looked up in a dictionary and clearly defined.

GOLDEN RULE: When studying this course, and indeed, whenever reading passages that you want to understand and make use of, make sure never to pass by a word or concept that you do not understand. If you do pass by a misunderstood word or concept, the rest of the text will probably become incomprehensible, and you will feel distracted and bored. If it's worth reading at all, then you owe it to yourself to define any word you're not sure of, or find the misunderstood word(s) in the concept that is unclear and sort that out before going further. If your studies bog down, go back to where you were doing well, clear up your understanding and start off again from that point.

Techniques in this course will reduce the time for each fixation (the assimilation of a group of words simultaneously) to less than a quarter of a second, and the size of fixation can be increased from one or two short words to as many as five words or half a line. Your eyes will be doing less physical work; rather than having as many as 500 tightly focused fixations per page, you will be making about 100, each of which is less fatiguing, and reading speed will exceed 1,000. w.p.m. on light material.

The Eye and its Movements

In order to understand how we read and how reading may be improved, we must first look a little at how the eye works. Light entering the eye is focused by the lens onto the retina, which lines the inside of the eye. The retina itself consists of hundreds of millions of tiny cells responsive to light. Some cells - the cones - respond to specific colours; others - the rods - to the overall light intensity. These cells are connected to a web of nerves extending over the retina, which relay information to the visual cortex.

The centre of the retina, called the fovea, is a small area in which the cells are much more tightly packed, so that the perception of images falling on the fovea is much sharper and more detailed than elsewhere on the retina. When we focus our attention on something, the light from that item is focused onto the fovea - this is called a fixation.

A reader's eyes do not move over print in a smooth manner. If they did, they would not be able to see anything, because the eye can only see things clearly when it can hold them still. If an object is still, the eye must be still in order to see it, and if an object is moving, the eye must move with the object in order to see it. When you read a line, the eyes move in a series of quick jumps and still intervals. The jumps themselves are so quick as to take almost no time, but the fixations can take anywhere from a quarter to one and a half seconds. At the slowest speeds of fixation a student's reading speed would be less than one hundred w.p.m.

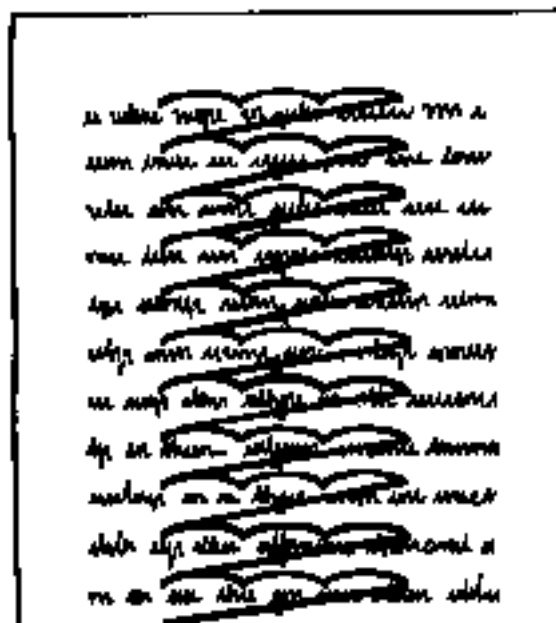
Thus the eye takes short gulps of information. In between it is not actually seeing anything; it is moving from one point to another. We do not notice these jumps because the information is held over in the brain and integrated from one fixation to the next so that we can perceive a smooth flow. The eye is rarely still for more than half a second. Even when you feel the eye is completely still (as when you look steadily at a fixed point such as the following comma), it will in fact be making a number of small movements around the point. If the eye were not constantly shifting in this way, and making new fixations, the image would rapidly fade and disappear. The untrained eye takes about a quarter of a second at each point of fixation, so it is limited to about four fixations per second. Each fixation of an average reader will take in two or three words, so that to read a line on this page probably takes between three and six fixations. The duration of the stops and the number of words taken in by each fixation will vary considerably, depending on both the material being read and the individual's reading skill.

Although the sharpest perception occurs at the fovea, images that are off-centre are still seen, but less clearly. This peripheral vision performs a most valuable

function during reading. Words that lie ahead of the current point of fixation will be partially received by the eye and transmitted to the brain. This is possible because words can be recognised when they are in peripheral vision and the individual letters are too blurred to be recognised. On the basis of this slightly blurred view of what is coming, the brain will tell the eye where to move to next. Thus the eye does not move along in a regular series of jumps, but skips redundant words and concentrates on the most significant (useful and distinguishing) words of the text.

Immediate memory span depends on the number of 'chunks' rather than the information content. When we read, we can take in about five chunks at a time. A chunk may be a single letter, a syllable, a word, or even a small phrase - the easier it is to understand, the larger will be the chunks.

In the case of a skilled reader, the fixation points tend to be concentrated towards the middle of a line of print. When the eye goes to a new line, it does not usually start at the beginning, instead it starts a word or two from the edge. The brain has a good idea of what is to come from the sense of the previous lines and only needs to check with peripheral vision that the first few words are as anticipated. Similarly, the eye usually makes its last fixation a word or two short of the end of a line, again making use of peripheral vision to check that the last few words are as expected.



The rhythm and flow of the faster reader will carry him comfortably through the meaning, whereas the slow reader will be far more likely to become bored and lose the meaning of what he is reading. A slow reader, who pauses at every word and skips back reading the same word two or three times, will not be able

to understand much of what he reads. By the end of a paragraph the concept is lost, because it is so long since the paragraph was begun. During the process of re-reading, his ability to remember fades, and he starts doubting his ability to remember at all.

There is a dwindling spiral of ability. The person re-reads more, then loses more trust in his memory and finally concludes that he doesn't understand what he is reading. For over a hundred years, experts in the field of medical and psychological research have concluded that most humans only use from 4% to 10% of their mental abilities - of their potential to learn, to think and to act. Speeding up a process such as reading is a very effective method of enabling a person to access a larger proportion of the 90-95% of the mental capacity that he is not using. When a person is reading rapidly, he is concentrating more, and when he can raise his speed of reading above about 500 w.p.m. with maximum comprehension, he is also speeding up his thinking. New depths of the brain become readily accessible.

In addition, accelerated reading can reduce fatigue. Faster reading improves comprehension, because the reader's level of concentration is higher, and there is less cause for him to develop physical tensions such as a pain in the neck or a headache. A further benefit is the improvement of the completeness of thought. E.g. try watching a 90 minute video tape in 9 ten-minute sections; comprehension will be much less than it would be had the video been presented in its entirety.

There is an optimum reading speed for maximum comprehension, which is proportional to your top speed. This rate will vary from one type of material to another, and finding the best rate for the material you are reading is critical for good comprehension.

Test of Reading Speed

Choose a novel or book that you are interested in and can read easily. Measure the time it takes to read five pages. Your reading speed can then be calculated using the following formula:

w.p.m. (speed) = (number of pages read) times (number of words per average page), divided by (the number of minutes spent reading).

Are you a Left-Brain Reader or a Right-Brain Reader?

Recently researches were carried out in the United States to determine the difference between a left-brain reader and a right-brain reader. A special apparatus was constructed, consisting of a television screen to present the reading material, with a cursor that the subject had to fixate upon. Eye-movements were monitored electronically, so the cursor would move when the subject moved his eyes. The equipment could be set up in two modes. In the first mode, material to the left of the cursor would blank out on the screen, if the subject attempted to move his fixation point to the right of the cursor. In the second mode, material to the right of the cursor would blank out, if the subject attempted to move his fixation point to the left of the cursor.

In the first (left-brain) mode, when words to the left of the cursor blanked out, preventing the subject from regressing or back-skipping, this duplicated the habitual pattern of a left-brain reader, who always reads one or more words ahead of a particular fixation point. In the second (right-brain) mode, when words to the right of the cursor blanked out, preventing the subject from anticipating by reading one or two words ahead of the fixation point, this duplicated the habitual pattern of a right-brain reader, who tends to re-read the words leading up to a particular fixation point.

This equipment was tested on a group of 30 subjects. When the equipment was set-up in the left-brain mode, the maximum observed average reading speed of the group was 1600 w.p.m., and when the equipment was set-up in the right-brain mode, the maximum observed average reading speed of the group was 95 w.p.m.; a difference of 17:1. Note: with material presented in the left-brain mode the average reading speed of the group was raised from 500 w.p.m. to 1600 w.p.m.; it was more than trebled.

Without the specialised equipment described above, this test is somewhat subjective, although it should give you a good indication. The steps are as follows:

1. Take a novel and read this silently whilst running your finger along the line of print as you read it.
2. Note carefully: How far are you reading ahead of your fixation point? The fixation point is determined by your finger position.
3. Do you find that it is difficult to read ahead of the fixation point? Do you find that you are holding on to the two or three words you have just read?

If the answer to 2. is yes, and you are reading ahead of the fixation point, you

are a left-brain reader. If the answer to 3. is yes, and attention is drawn back to the words that you have already read, then you are a right-brain reader.

Visual Guides

A visual guide is a pointer, such as the end of a pencil or a fingertip, moved along underneath a line of print. The reason children are discouraged from pointing to the words as they read them, is that stopping to point at each individual word can indeed slow down reading. But if instead, the finger is moved along smoothly underneath the line of text, it can help to speed up reading considerably, for three reasons:

1. If the eye is trained to follow the visual guide, then most unnecessary back- skipping is eliminated.
2. Deliberately speeding up the visual guide will help the eye to move along faster.
3. As the eye moves faster it is encouraged to take in more words with each fixation. This increases the meaningful content of the material - each chunk makes some sense - so that comprehension actually improves.

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The following practical procedures are divided into six sections:

- A. Preliminary Exercises, to teach a better method of inner speech.
- B. Speed Perception, to improve your capacity to duplicate;
- C. Pacing & Scanning Techniques, to improve your initial understanding at speed;
- D. In-Depth Reading Techniques, including the use of keywords and mindmaps to improve depth of understanding;
- E. Visual Reading Techniques, to improve retention and recall.
- F. Defeating the Decay of Memories, to apply the newly acquired speed of thought to learning new information.

Therefore, the following selection of exercises reflect the three dimensions of Duplication, Understanding, and Memory.

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