

Two Speed Reading Tips



With the mass of reading material now urgently demanding our attention, no-one can afford to spend valuable time reading in the way we were taught. We have to find new ways of coping with the overload, of selecting and prioritising the right things to read and of being able to recall and communicate what we have read.

It's simple mathematics really. If you can read two or three times faster, you can get through more material in the time available. The end result is that you'll become better-informed than ever.

But it's not just about knowing a great deal about a large number of subjects: reading faster will also help to expand the capacity of your mind. Your memory will improve, you'll be able to communicate better and you'll feel much more confident.

If you are drowning in a mass of reading material, these tips will help you to speed up:

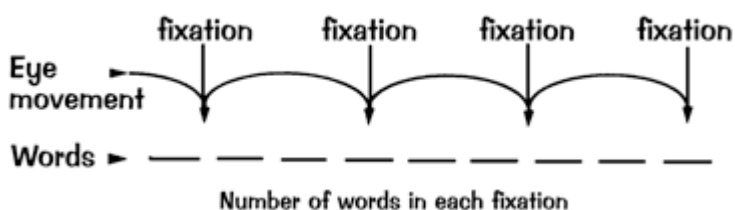
1. Be aware of how the eyes actually work when you read.
2. Use a guide.

1. How the eyes work

To read faster you need to first understand a little about how your eyes work when you read. This will enable you to make them perform more efficiently - by moving faster across and down the page. Most people make two major wrong assumptions about what their eyes are doing when they read.

- They believe that their eyes read faster than is actually the case. The average adult reading speed on even light material is only about 240 words per minute
- They assume that the eyes glide smoothly from left to right when they read.

But if our eyes really moved over print in a smooth manner, they wouldn't be able to take anything in. This is because the eye can only see things clearly when it can look at them directly: it has to hold them still.



For the eye to take in words, it has to pause on each word, or group of words, before moving on. To read a whole sentence or paragraph, the eyes have to move in a series of quick jumps and stops.

The jumps themselves are very quick, but the stops (or fixations) can last from a quarter of a second to one and a half seconds.

People who normally read one word at a time have to jump after each word - and can therefore only achieve very slow reading speeds. If they also back-skip to re-read or check what's gone before (which is very often associated with word-by-word reading) their speed, and their comprehension, will be even slower.

2. Using a guide



When children learn how to read, they often point to the words as they read them. We have traditionally regarded this as a symptom of immature reading, and have told them to take their fingers off the page. But instead of insisting that they remove their fingers, we should ask them to move their fingers faster.

The hand can be a powerful aid in helping the eye to speed up and the reader to establish a smooth, rhythmical reading habit.

The reason for using a guide is that our eyes move faster and more accurately when they have something to focus on. You don't have to use your finger as a visual guide; you can use a pointer such as a pen or a pencil, as many naturally efficient readers do.

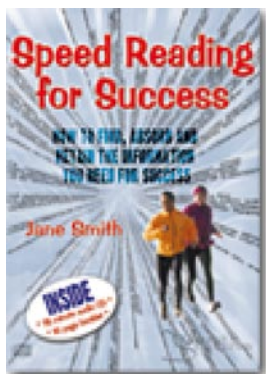
At first, it may seem that the pointer is slowing down your reading speed. This is because we imagine that we read faster than we actually do. But, when you measure it, you'll find that the pointer-aided speed **is** faster.

A pointer will increase your reading in three different ways.

- First, it will make you move your eye forward and eliminate back skipping.
- Second, it will help you to move your eyes along faster - because the faster you guide your eye the faster you'll read.
- And third, it will make you reduce the number of fixations you make. As the eye moves faster it is encouraged to take in more words with each fixation.

There are many different ways of using the visual guide. The classic technique is to take a pen or pencil and hold it under the line of type, about one centimetre away from the left-hand margin. Then you pull the pointer very smoothly along underneath the line till you reach a spot about one centimetre away from the right-hand margin. After that, move your pen or pencil down to the next line and do the same again. Continue until you've read the whole page, using a smooth rhythmic action.

If using a guide feels strange, it may be just a question of getting used to the new habit. If you feel that the guide gets in the way or that you can't move it as fast as you would like to read, try moving the guide in a different way.



These transcript extracts are taken from ***Speed Reading for Success***, (pub Word Smiths, ISBN 0954886003).

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