

EDUCATION

Speedy Reading for Jet Age

Reading speed of most adults is totally inadequate. Special courses can increase most persons' reading speed by about 90%, Marjorie Van de Water reports.

► IN THIS JET AGE most of us read at a horse-and-buggy rate. We are operating at about 20% of our reading capacity. Most adults, trying to keep abreast of an ever-increasing tide of reading matter, are nevertheless slow, inefficient readers.

Yet you can learn to read faster. You can take a 30-hour course and step up your reading rate by about 90%—if you are reasonably intelligent, have good eyes or wear correct glasses, and if you have an adequate vocabulary or are willing to put some time into increasing your vocabulary.

Some teachers claim that you can learn to read from three to ten times faster than you do at the beginning of your course. Fabulous rates of reading as high as 15,000 words per minute claimed by some teachers are considered by other, more conservative teachers as "unbelievable." But there is no doubt that the average person can boost his reading speed to a rate that he might not believe possible before training.

How To Speed Up

Here are some of the things you should do to speed up your reading rate. If, when you learned to read, you pronounced the words aloud, this practice may have left you with some bad reading habits.

Some persons still move their lips when they read, silently forming the words even though they do not speak them aloud. Others may have abandoned this habit of lip movement and mumbling but still retain movements of the tongue and vocal chords.

If you suspect that you may do this, you can check yourself by laying your fingers lightly on the side of your throat as you read. Do you feel a slight tremor or quiver of your muscles? You will naturally rid yourself of these habits left over from childhood as you force yourself to read more rapidly.

There is no time to go through the motions of pronouncing words while you are reading at top speed.

You will need to train your eyes. If your job has required you to proofread or watch carefully for misspellings, transposed letters, etc., you must make a special effort to "unlearn" this habit.

Try not to see separate words—never single letters. Look for groups of words that express a thought, especially those that are frequently used together in the same pattern and learn to perceive this entire pattern at a single glance.

Pay attention to the movements of your eyes as you read—if you have access to an optical instrument called an ophthalmograph, ask someone to use it to photograph

the movements of your eyes as they follow along a line and down the page.

Many people allow their eyes to backtrack—to look back for another try at a difficult or unfamiliar word. Such backtracking is wasteful of time, tiring to the eyes and slows greatly your speed of reading. You can correct this habit, if you observe it in yourself, by forcing your eyes to move in a smooth, rhythmic way, sweeping at an ever increasing pace down the page.

There are several ways to pace yourself and force yourself to move along faster. A machine used by some reading improvement courses moves a narrow beam of light at a controlled speed down the page. This method discourages you from looking back over material you have already read because that part of the page is in darkness. Similarly, you are not tempted to "peek ahead" to find out what is coming.

If you do not have such a machine, you can use your own finger. Move it down the page at an even rate and make your eyes follow along. To time your finger movement, use a metronome or have a friend count 1, 2, 3, 4 at a steady rate.

You can train your eye to take in more at a single look. Some reading improvement courses for high government officials use a tachistoscope, or "flash meter," to expose a number or four or five words for

only one-hundredth of a second.

To get an idea just how quick a one-hundredth of a second flash really is, look at a camera when there is no film in it. Set the exposure for one-hundredth of a second and watch the shutter as you press the trigger. It is really not much of a look.

You can mount some words and numbers on cards and have a friend expose the cards at one-hundredth of a second rate. At first you will probably be able to see only two or three short words but soon you can build up to four or five. At first you may have trouble reading a five-digit number but gradually you can build up to seven.

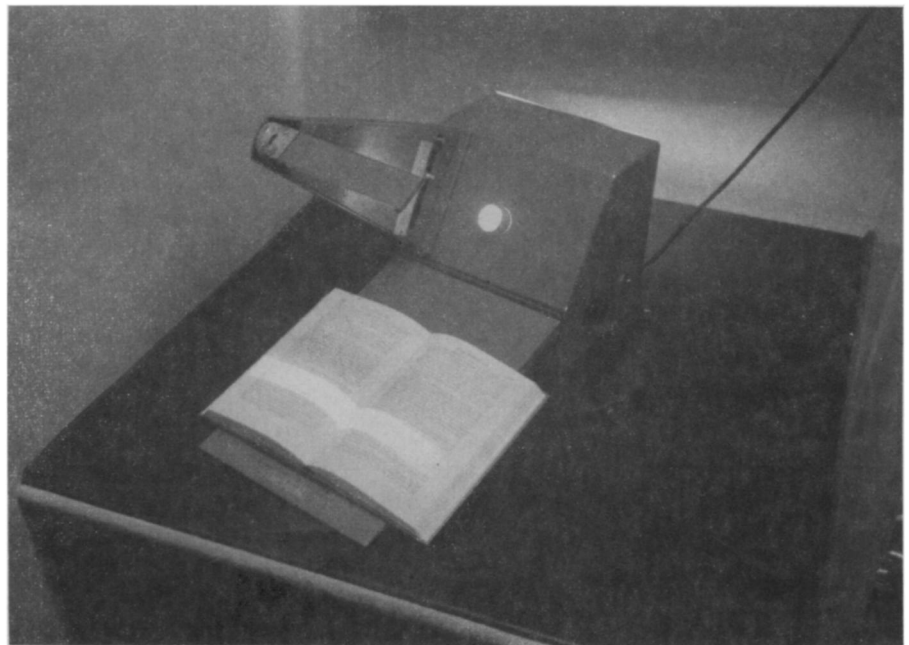
Widen Eye Span

This is similar to the way pilots and observers were taught during World War II to recognize enemy airplanes as they flashed overhead in a battle area.

It is important for rapid reading to widen your eye-span. Keep working on it until you can take in a complete line of a newspaper column at one look.

In addition to training your eyes, you can learn other things about reading that will help you get through the books and papers you want to read.

First rule, perhaps, is to be flexible. Keep in mind the purpose for which you are reading and adapt your method of reading accordingly. Some material you read for the esthetic delight in the writer's style, the artistic selection of words or the way long sentences are followed by short sentences, a staccato effect interspersed with long



READING MACHINE—With this pacer, in which a narrow beam of light moves down the page at a controlled speed, many persons have learned to increase their reading speed considerably.

smoothly flowing passages. If this is your purpose in reading a particular book or story, by all means pay attention to style and individual words.

If, however, you are reading directions for building a bookcase or a birdhouse, never mind style, go at once to the heart of the matter.

Some people, who were taught as children to plow patiently and methodically through any book "from cover to cover" have a guilty feeling if they skip or skim through any portion that is of no particular interest or value to them. But to get a lot of reading done in the limited time available, it is extremely valuable to learn how to skim. Then read carefully only those portions that contribute to your purpose.

S-P-D Approach Used

In the U. S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School reading improvement course, they teach what is called the S-P-D approach to help with reading the kind of informational material that you need to read to keep up with your job and to keep informed about what is going on in the world. The letters stand for Survey, Preread and Decide and refer to three steps that enable you to read "practical prose" more efficiently.

Step 1. S—Survey. When you pick out a book or an article to read, first size it up. Ask yourself why you are reading it—what you hope to gain from it. How is it organized? If there is a summary, read this first.

Step 2. P—Preread. This is to give you a kind of bird's-eye view of the material. First read the introduction, the first paragraph or two rapidly. Next, read the first sentence only of each paragraph until you reach the last paragraph or two—the conclusion. Well written paragraphs usually have a "main idea" sentence called the topic sentence. This is usually the first sentence in the paragraph. So if you read the first sentence of each paragraph, you will get the gist of the article quickly. Lastly, read the last paragraph or two rapidly.

Step 3. D—Decide. The process of pre-reading has given you a good rough idea of the contents of the material. You are now able to make up your mind whether you need to go any further with it or whether it is not going to be worth while to spend any more of your precious time on it.

If you decide that it is not going to give you the information you want, skip it and begin again on your second selection.

If, on the other hand, you find that it contains important material, you can choose one of three courses.

1. Skim it. Look carefully at any tables, graphs and photographs. Read any paragraphs that during your prereading roused your curiosity or interest.
2. Read it. If it seems worth your while, read carefully the whole article or book.
3. Study it. If it contains material you will want to remember or refer to later, go over the whole thing critically. Underline key passages or mark in the margin so that you can spot them quickly later when you wish to refer to them.

Study of students at the Agriculture Department and military officials showed that

at the start of the reading course, the slowest reader could read at 115 words per minute. The fastest read at 615 words per minute.

At the completion of the short reading course, many had doubled their initial reading rate. Some even tripled their speed without appreciable loss in comprehension.

In fact, teachers find that at a faster reading rate, comprehension tends to be better because the student is paying attention to ideas rather than to words. They have learned to get quickly an impression of the main point that the author is trying to present instead of being diverted by paying attention to minor details along the way.

The effort necessary to speed up your reading is well rewarded and more and more reading matter is constantly beckoning to you to hurry on and taste it.

The presses of United States book publishers are whirring at a tremendous pace, grinding out new books to add to the total of reading matter. In 1960 more than 15,000 books were published in the U. S., not counting Government reports, directions for filling out income tax returns or pamphlets of fewer than 49 pages. One hundred fifteen works of fiction alone were published in the month of December.

Many individuals like to keep up with the best or most popular novels. In addition they may read from one to three newspapers every day. News magazines are perused regularly. Journals or trade magazines having to do with the employment of the individual must be covered. And there may also be a stack of directives, new laws or regulations, employment rules, to say nothing of daily correspondence—personal and business.

Rapid-reading courses have gained a tremendous popularity. Most universities are conducting courses in efficient reading. People, newly aware of the handicap of slow reading, are willingly paying out \$150 each for 30 hours of class lessons in commercial courses. Big businesses are sponsoring courses for key employees. Government offices are putting senior officials through rapid-reading courses.

• Science News Letter, 80:242 October 7, 1961

Questions

NATURAL RESOURCES—Which process for converting salt water to fresh is the most promising? p. 237.

SPACE—What is the chemical used as fuel in a new ion engine? p. 235.

VITAL STATISTICS—What is the average life span according to latest statistics? p. 239.

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