Speeding Up Your Reading

Many of us read more slowly than we are able to. Why?

We were taught to read with a heavy emphasis on oral reading. We read aloud for the teacher and/or classmates. This was how the teacher ascertained that we were developing the word-recognition skills that were required in the early grades. The problem is that we were never ‘taught’ that silent reading is a new, more sophisticated process. We needed to learn to build on word-recognition skills to develop idea-processing skills in later grades, and most of us never received this instruction.

What slows you down?

- Physical reading: mouthing or throating the words. (Moving your lips as you read.)
- Auditory reading: (a relic from being taught to read by reading aloud.) Auditory readers ‘hear’ the words in their mind while they read. This limits their reading speed to their rate of speech.
- Regressing: backtracking and re-reading passages that you just read because you realize that you weren’t paying attention. Reading silently is done with our eyes, and they can take in more text and process it faster than our normal rate of speech. When we plod along at 150 words per minute, we get bored and lose focus.

How do you speed up?

- Train your eye to take in larger chunks of print. Instead of looking at words, look at phrases. Instead of focusing on a line, focus slightly above the line, and try to see groups of words. (See exercises on reverse)
- Push forward. Avoid reading and re-reading. Instead, think about what you are seeing and how you respond to it. Ask questions about what is coming up rather than what you have covered. This supports comprehension because it improves your concentration. Use a ruler, paper or your hand to lead your eye forward in the text. Pace yourself at a speed slightly faster than your normal reading rate. Monitor your comprehension as you go along.
Here are some exercises to build reading speed. Practice them to build speed, but don’t sacrifice comprehension. Comprehension will improve as you become a more skilled, efficient reader. Practice speed-reading techniques with the newspaper, magazines or supplementary reading materials.

**Exercise #1:** Soft-focus your eye above the centre of the line of print below. Then, without moving your eyes, read as much of the print as you can. Try moving from right to left of centre (back and forth).

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I E J B L U A B D B L M J E I L Q O C
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**Exercise #2:** Now with words...Stop your eye once on each phrase and read it with one look.

As you know  
If I could all day long  
she was wondering  
many different ways

You may send anything for Mom’s birthday but don’t forget to send something because last year we all forgot and her feelings were really hurt.

**Exercise #3:** Read the following paragraph phrase by phrase. Stop your eye once for each phrase and take in the meaning of the phrase rather than the individual words. Read for meaning, rather than for every word.

This experience really bites. Your feet hurt when you get up in the morning and after you walk in the mall. You need your glasses to read the paper, and you can never remember where you put them. You often find yourself wondering why you came into the kitchen just now. Your idea of a good day is seeing evidence that the oatmeal and prune juice are working. All of the interesting, exciting things are now experienced by your children, who hassle you about not wanting to go rollerblading. Instead of the before-dinner cocktail you used to enjoy, you lean toward warm milk or Ovaltine before bed — and bedtime is sometimes before dark. You sound like your parents—to your own disgust—and, well, you realize that what they say is true: getting old is just not for sissies.

**Exercise #4:** Try using these strategies with supplementary course readings or other (not textbooks) reading assignments. Again, don’t sacrifice comprehension, but try to speed up to improve your comprehension.