USP
CENTRE FOR FLEXIBLE AND DISTANCE LEARNING
Student Learning Support

What is Speed Reading?

Speed reading is the ability to read fast, catching more words at a glance and at the same time having a higher level of comprehension.

How do I calculate Words Per Minute?

1. Count the number of words on three consecutive full lines of print. (For example, 33 words on three lines)

2. Divide this by 3 to give average words per line. (For example, 11 words per line)

3. Count the number of lines of print down the left hand side of the page. (For example, 40 lines of print)

4. Multiply the number of lines of print by the average words per line. (For example, 40 x 11 = 440 words per page)

5. Count the number of pages read in a known time period (For example, 6 pages)

6. Multiple the number of pages read by the words per page. The result is total words read. (For example 6 x 440 = 2640 words)

7. Divide the total words read by the time it took you to read them. (For example, 2640 + 10 minutes = 264 words per minute)

8. The result is words per minute!

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Why speed read?

1. It takes less time.
2. It increases retention.
3. It increases comprehension.
4. It avoids delays in preparation for assignments and tests

What is your reading speed?

Test your reading speed by doing Activity 1

Activity 1

Set a timer and read the article on the next page. Calculate your reading speed and then evaluate yourself as a reader.

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Children's attitudes to reading

Children's enjoyment of reading, which was rapidly declining in 2003, appears to have stabilised in 2007 but remains significantly below the levels of enjoyment reported in 1998. Juliet Sizmur, Senior Researcher at the National Foundation for Educational Research, reports on a recent survey.

Where do our children look for entertainment? Where do they find information? What do they most enjoy? Many years ago the answers to any of these questions might have been `books'. But is that still so today? In this multimedia world of DVD, computer games, mobile phones and internet, children are certainly not using books in the same way they did 20, or even ten, years ago. But reading is still part of most children's day to day life, and understanding how they feel about it can help us to help them get the most out of their reading experiences. In the Summer term of 2007, the National Foundation for Educational Research carried out its third national Reading Survey of children's attitudes to reading using a questionnaire designed to investigate children's reading enjoyment, confidence and preferences. This study followed identical surveys in 1998 and 2003. The main purpose of re-running the survey was to illuminate children's current attitudes, but also to reveal any changes that might have taken place over the last four years. When the last Reading Survey was carried out in 2003, it showed that, while levels of confidence had increased, levels of enjoyment had declined very significantly. The current 2007 study indicates that levels of confidence have remained steady and largely unchanged since 2003. Levels of enjoyment have also remained unchanged and, although they have not returned to the high levels reported in 1998, they have stopped falling. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) international studies of 2001 and 2006 also found that the enjoyment of reading reported by schoolchildren in England is poor compared to their peers in other countries. The current study focuses on the attitudes to reading of 4477 primary school pupils across England.

The questionnaire was completed in June 2007 by 2278 Year 4 and 2199 Year 6 children in a national sample of 61 schools. Of these, 27 schools had also participated in the previous surveys in 1998 and 2003. Children were invited to agree or disagree - including a `not sure' option - with a series of statements about their attitudes to reading. The questionnaire also asked how often they read at home, and what they chose to read.

Enjoyment

When teacher assessment levels were taken into account, there was a significant relationship between higher attainment and positive attitudes. This is, again, in line with previous research. Questions about the perceived difficulty of reading, suggest that children's perceptions of their own reading ability are relatively accurate, since children with lower teacher assessment levels were significantly more likely to say they found reading difficult and seek help with their reading.

Confidence

In keeping with the previous surveys, the current study found that most children reported that they enjoy reading. Sixty-five per cent said they enjoy it, while 73 per cent said they like reading silently by themselves and 65 per cent did not think reading is boring. The younger age group is slightly more positive about reading than the older. In the main, children choose to read stories, magazines and comics. Stories remain the most popular with Year 4 pupils, but Year 6 pupils prefer to …

Literacy Today, March 2008

by Juliet Sizmur

Reading Speed Guide

Poor Reading Speed: 0-150 words per minute

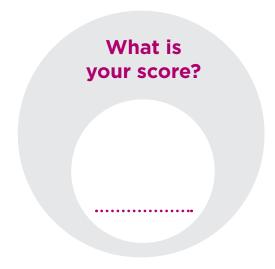**Average Reading Speed:** 150-300 words per minute

Good Reading Speed: 300-500 words per minute

Excellent Reading Speed: 500-750 words per minute

Unbelievable Reading Speed: 750-1000 words per minute

What is your score?

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The international average reading speed is accepted to be about 250 words per minute. What did you score in the reading speed check? Compare this to the average and decide your own reading ability.

Some factors that contribute to poor reading

→ Sub-vocalization – pronouncing the words in your mind

→ Regression, going back to previous sentences or phrases

→ Fear of losing comprehension - strong belief in the myth that slow reading results in higher level of comprehension and vice versa.

→ Lack of preparation before reading

→ The question "What one needs to be achieved after reading the text?" is not considered.

Techniques to improve your reading speed:

→ Avoid sub-vocalisation in your mind.

→ Instead of reading a piece of text 'word-by-word', try to read the text 'block-by-block' i.e. look at phrases and groups of words instead of looking at the individual words themselves.

→ Use a pacer like a pen or your finger to increase your speed. But make sure that your eyes follow the pacer.

→ Reduce fixation time (the amount of time spent on a word).

→ Avoid reading back. Read forward, keeping the main idea in mind.

→ Practice reading e.g. by reading a newspaper or a magazine. Develop a reading habit. Read for at least 10 minutes every day.

→ Use your peripheral (vision outside the centre of the gaze) vision as well.

→ Skim and scan to identify the essential and non essential parts of the texts.

→ Read at the time of the day when you are most alert.

→ Find a reading spot, away from distractions.

Activity 2

Now that you have looked at some ways of increasing your reading speed why don't you try using them? Read the article on the next page using the reading techniques and calculate your reading speed again. Is there any difference between your scores?

Prof. A.C. Grayling, in a review of 'A History of Reading by Alberto Manguel' that was published in Financial Times had said, "To read is to fly: it is to soar to a point of vantage which gives a view over wide terrains of history, human variety, ideas, shared experience and the fruits of many inquiries." So true! Reading is really like taking a flight to high altitudes in pursuit of information and knowledge. It is a journey in search of enlightenment.

Have you asked yourself the question, "Why is reading important?" What was the answer that you got? I am sure your heart must have answered in favor of reading. Reading is like providing the mind with nourishment. Knowledge is the food for the mind and soul. Apart from giving us the basic information about the world around us, it also provides us with the food for thought. It encourages us to think. It increases our hunger for knowledge and our thirst to learn more.

During the ancient times, reading was limited to books. But today, it encompasses reading on the web. We have some very good sites providing their readers with authentic information. Reading from the Internet is an easy option for one and all. Reading from the web does not undermine the pleasure one can get from reading books.

We are introduced to the concept of reading at a very early age. It remains with us in different forms throughout our life. School-life begins with books. Books are our close companions in the youth. Reading continues to remain the favorite pastime of a large number of people even during their old age. For voracious readers, books are their lifelong companions.

It is very important to inculcate the habit of reading right from childhood. You can put in children the habit of reading bedtime stories. Reading during the early years helps the child in improving his/her language skills. The child learns to recognize written words. Reading when young helps you in your later life. Studies say that reading before going to bed helps the child feel secure and comfortable while sleeping. Emotions can be best understood through the characters in stories.

A child who grows up reading is definitely enriched as a young person. He/she automatically takes to reading. If the habit of reading is formed during an early age, reading soon becomes the person's hobby. Teenage years are the growing and developing years of one's life. This is the period of one's mental growth as well. So it is nice to read good books during these years. Youngsters often relate to the story of heroes and try to emulate their behaviors. They idealize their favorite authors. They dream about their future and plan for it. Feeding the brain with loads of information from all around the world during this phase of life helps a person base his ideals on positivities. Reading helps the person shape his/her life.

Reading is an activity that keeps us occupied. Reading results in the fruitful usage of time. It helps us get rid of our anxieties. It diverts our mind from monotony and boredom. It is one of the best ways of relaxation. Reading novels or stories takes us to a new world where we forget our sorrows and fears. Books make very good friends.

Books and the web are the richest sources of information. They cover a wide range of topics and store an enormous amount of information. Numerous websites covering different areas of information or innumerable books that flood the libraries tell us of the vastness of knowledge. Reading leads us only to read more in the never-ending pursuit of knowledge.

Research has shown that avid readers stand out from the rest because of improved cognitive abilities. They can think creatively. It improves their grasping power. It makes them better analyzers and problem solvers. Reading helps a person be successful in life.

I hope you have read all about 'reading' and are convinced about why reading is so important. Keep reading ...

By Manali Oak
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