READING SPEED

The sheer amount of reading required at the college level can at first seem daunting. One skill that will help you tackle the workload successfully is an awareness of your reading speed. While reading above **280 words per minute** (wpm) will be necessary to accomplish the university workload, some Regent

According to the Institute of Reading Development (2022), reading above 200 words per minute will contribute towards better engagement with the text, whether you are reading for work or pleasure. Reading above 800 words per minute equates to skimming, and ultimately will harm your comprehension.

University professors specify that reading about **400 wpm** is ideal. Your first step towards that goal is to determine your current reading speed, and then gradually increase it. This resource is designed to get you started on that path.

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR READING SPEED

1. **Determine the average number of words per line in your current textbook** – First, count all the characters (letters, punctuation, and spaces) in one, full line of your textbook. Then, divide that number by six. Round to the nearest whole number. The result is the average number of words per line in your particular textbook.
    - If it is too difficult to see each individual character, instead count how many words there are on four, full lines of the text. Then, divide that number by four to find an average number of words per line in your textbook.

2. **Time yourself reading for one minute in the textbook** – Mark the spot where you start reading, then read for one minute at a comfortable pace. Do not race! Read at your natural speed now, so that you can get an accurate starting point from which to grow. Mark the spot where you stop reading after the minute is over.

3. **Count how many lines you read and use that to determine how many words you read** – Count the number of lines and multiply it by the number of words that you determined in step one. This is your average number of words read per minute—your reading speed.

*If your current speed is below what you desire, do not be discouraged! The strategies below will help you increase your speed. Be *encouraged*—even small improvements will help you accomplish your required reading in less time and comprehend it better as well.

1. **Set a goal** – When you want to read faster, it is important to make a realistic goal. Add no more than 50 words at a time to your current speed in a given week.

2. **Use an object to guide your eyes along the line you are reading in the text book** – Find an object that you can use to underline the line you are reading and lead your eyes across the page. Choose an object like three or four fingers held together, a notecard, or a bookmark. This size object is ideal because it hides the majority of the unread words, helping your eyes to focus on the line you are currently reading. By moving the object across the page faster, you lead your eyes to move faster as well (Institute of Reading Development, 2022). Here is a video of our [recommended method](#).

3. **Time yourself reading again for one minute to check your progress** – Make sure to continue to time yourself so that you do not move too quickly. You should increase your speed gradually. (Remember if you switch textbooks, you will need to figure out the average number of words per line in the new textbook before timing yourself and calculating your speed.)

4. **Ensure that you are not increasing your speed too quickly** – To check in on your comprehension, try explaining what you read to someone. If you cannot explain it accurately, you may be moving too quickly and need to lessen your goal for the week.

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

Once you have applied and practiced the above strategy, examine these miscellaneous tips from Sampeio de Alencar and Tavares de Alencar (2017). Try what you think sounds interesting and see what works for you.

1. **Skim the material first to see which parts are important and should be read more thoroughly** (p. 80). You can also adjust your speed to slow down on more important parts and go a little more quickly through less important sections.

2. **Absorb the material in blocks, rather than word by word** (p. 81). In other words, try looking at a line or even a paragraph as a whole chunk, rather than looking at each individual word within the line or paragraph.

3. **Eliminate the voice in your head that silently says the words to yourself as you read them**. This takes up valuable time and limits your reading speed to your approximate speaking speed. Instead, try repeatedly counting to four silently or humming while you read (p. 81).

4. **Cover up words you have already read and/or will read, to eliminate distraction** (p. 82).

5. **Do not let yourself read the same section over and over** (pp. 81-82).

PRACTICE NOW

References

Andrianatos, K. (2018). *First year university students' reading strategies and comprehension: implications for academic reading support* [Doctoral dissertation, North-West University]. North-West University Digital Archive. http://hdl.handle.net/10394/28756.

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Sampeio de Alencar, M., & Tavares de Alencar, T. (2017). *Scientific style in English*. River Publishers.