

# Speed Reading

Speed reading involves selecting the appropriate pace to support your learning and being able to efficiently skim your readings for important information. The goal is to decrease the time it takes you to read while increasing your retention. However, increasing speed is not an effective strategy for all students.

## Factors that reduce reading rate

These conditions act also to reduce comprehension increasing the reading rate through eliminating them is likely to result in increased comprehension as well. This is an entirely different matter from simply speeding up the rate of reading without reference to the conditions responsible for the slow rate.

1. **Limited perceptual span**; word-by-word reading.
2. **Slow perceptual reaction time**; slowness of recognition to the material.
3. **Vocalization**, including the need to vocalize in order to achieve comprehension.
4. **Faulty eye movements**, including inaccuracy in placement of the page, in return sweep, in rhythm and regularity of movement, etc.
5. **Rereading material just read.**
6. **Poor evaluation of which aspects are important and which are unimportant.**
7. **The effort to remember everything rather than to remember selectively.**

## Strategies to increase reading rate:

1. **Have your eyes checked.** Before embarking on a speed reading program, make sure that any correctable eye defects you may have are taken care of by checking with your eye doctor. Often, very slow reading is related to uncorrected eye defects.
2. **Eliminate the habit of pronouncing words as you read.** If you sound out words in your throat or whisper them, you can read slightly only as fast as you can read aloud. You should be able to read most materials at least two or three times faster silently than orally. If you are aware of sounding or "hearing" words as you read, try to concentrate on key words and meaningful ideas as you force yourself to read faster. Instead of verbalizing words try to visualize the words you are reading.



3. **Avoid regressing (re-reading).** Rereading words and phrases is a habit which will slow your reading speed down to a snail's pace. Usually, it is unnecessary to reread words, for the ideas you want are explained and elaborated more fully in later contexts. Furthermore, the slowest reader usually regresses most frequently. Because he/ she reads slowly, his/ her mind has time to wander and his rereading reflects both his/ her inability to concentrate and lack of confidence in his/ her comprehension skills.

4. **Develop a wider eye span.**  
The number of words the eye registers on any given fixation is referred to as an eye span. The average eye span is about two to three words. Training your eyes to absorb more than two to three words at a time will help you read faster. Since written material is less meaningful if read word by word, this will help you learn to read by phrases or thought units.



5. **Vary your reading speed.** Not all material requires the same reading speed. When you are seeing information for the first time or you are having difficulty understanding the material, slow down your reading speed. Comprehension is the goal not reading speed.
6. **Use the pacer technique.** Some of us still use our fingers to help skim information. In these instances, our fingers are our pacers. You can however use a pen or highlighter as your pacer, if this feels more comfortable. Using a pacer forces your eyes to focus when and where you want them to focus. With a pacer, it's nearly impossible to lose your place on a page, and it's a lot easier to advance to each successive line. All of this helps increase reading speed. Since pacers involve using other parts of the body, it's easier to stay alert while reading. To increase your reading speed, move your pacer at a faster (yet comfortable) pace. Once you feel comfortable at this pace increase your speed slightly again.
7. **Practice.** As with every new skill, reading must be practiced to enhance speed. Be patient with yourself as you are learning these new strategies.
8. **Visit a success coach.** If you would like more information on how to incorporate these strategies into your study routine visit a success coach. To book an appointment, visit the student success office (2nd floor of south campus hall) or call 519-888-4567 ext. 84410.

Adapted from – University of Maryland & Coles Notes (2010). Speed Reading Study Guide, Toronto, On: Coles Publishing.