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978-0-521-21346-2 - Practical Faster Reading: A Course in Reading and Vocabulary for Upper-intermediate and More Advanced Students

Gerald Mosback and Vivienne Mosback

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introductory passages 1–4

Note to students

Passages 1–4 revise points you may have covered in preliminary reading courses, but they may include some new hints. Read these passages carefully. They will also serve to familiarize you with the layout of the passages and questions for the speed reading practice in passages 5–30.

Introductory passage 1

Faster effective reading

The comprehension passages on this course are designed to help you increase your reading speed. A higher reading rate, with no loss of comprehension, will help you in other subjects as well as English, and the general principles apply to any language. Naturally, you will not read every book at the same speed. You would expect to read a newspaper, for example, much more rapidly than a physics or economics textbook – but you can raise your *average* reading speed over the whole range of materials you wish to cover so that the percentage gain will be the same whatever kind of reading you are concerned with. 5

The reading passages which follow are all of an average level of difficulty for your stage of instruction. They are all approximately 500 words long. They are about topics of general interest which do not require a great deal of specialized knowledge. Thus they fall between the kind of reading you might find in your textbooks and the much less demanding kind you will find in a newspaper or light novel. If you read *this* kind of English, with understanding, at, say, 400 words per minute, you might skim through a newspaper at perhaps 650–700, while with a difficult textbook you might drop to 200 or 250. 10 15

Perhaps you would like to know what reading speeds are common among native English-speaking university students and how those speeds can be improved. Tests in Minnesota, U.S.A., for example, have shown that students without special training can read English of average difficulty, for example Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in translation, at speeds of between 240 and 250 w.p.m. with about 70% comprehension. Minnesota claims that after 12 half-hour lessons, one a week, the reading speed can be increased, with no loss of comprehension, to around 500 w.p.m. It is further claimed that with intensive training over seventeen weeks, speeds of over 1000 w.p.m. can be reached, but this would be quite exceptional. 20 25

If you get to the point where you can read books of average difficulty at between 400 and 500 w.p.m. with 70% or more comprehension, you will be doing quite well, though of course any further improvement of speed-with-comprehension will be a good thing. 30

In this and the following three passages we shall be looking at some of the obstacles to faster reading and what we can do to overcome them.

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[More information](#)*Introductory passage 1**Think of the passage as a whole*

When you practise reading with passages shorter than book length, like 35
the passages in this course, do not try to take in each word separately,
one after the other. It is much more difficult to grasp the broad theme
of the passage this way, and you will also get stuck on individual words
which may not be absolutely essential to a general understanding of the
passage. It is a good idea to skim through the passage very quickly first 40
(say 500 words in a minute or so) to get the general idea of each paragraph.
Titles, paragraph headings and emphasized words (underlined or in italics)
can be a great help in getting this skeleton outline of the passage. It is
surprising how many people do not read titles, introductions or paragraph
headings. Can you, *without* looking back, remember the title of this 45
passage and the heading of this paragraph?

Ideas

Select the answer which is most accurate according to the information given in the passage.

- 1 A higher reading rate will help in other subjects as well as English
 - a) provided there is no loss of understanding.
 - b) only if we memorize well.
 - c) but not in any other language.
 - d) though not as a general principle.
- 2 You would expect to read a difficult economics textbook
 - a) as fast as you read a newspaper.
 - b) more slowly than you read a newspaper.
 - c) more quickly than you read these passages.
 - d) only very rarely.
- 3 You can expect to read the passages on this course
 - a) more quickly than you read your textbooks.
 - b) more quickly than you read a newspaper.
 - c) more slowly than you read your textbooks.
 - d) faster than any other kind of material.
- 4 The average untrained native speaker at the University of Minnesota
 - a) reads at 600 w.p.m.
 - b) reads at about 300 w.p.m.
 - c) cannot read difficult works in translation.
 - d) reads at about 245 w.p.m.
- 5 The University of Minnesota claims that in 12 half-hour lessons
 - a) it can triple a student's reading speed.
 - b) it can double a student's reading speed.
 - c) it can increase a student's reading speed four times.
 - d) no real increase in reading speed can be achieved.

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[More information](#)*Introductory passage 1*

- 6 Intensive training over seventeen weeks can
- triple an untrained student's reading speed.
 - increase an untrained student's reading speed four times.
 - double an untrained student's reading speed.
 - triple the students' comprehension scores.
- 7 You will be doing quite well if you can read books of average difficulty
- at about 450 w.p.m. with 70% comprehension.
 - at about 600 w.p.m. with 60% comprehension.
 - at about 300 w.p.m. with 70% comprehension.
 - at about 250 w.p.m. with 50% comprehension.
- 8 Reading words one at a time is bad because
- it hurts your eyes.
 - all words are equally important.
 - it is more difficult to get the general idea of a passage.
 - some words are longer than others.
- 9 It is a good idea to skim through a passage quickly first
- at about 350 w.p.m.
 - to get the general idea of each paragraph.
 - so that you can take in each word separately.
 - to make sure you get to the end at least once.
- 10 Titles and paragraph headings
- are more important than anything else.
 - are surprising to many people.
 - can easily be remembered without looking back.
 - can help us get the outline of a passage.

Vocabulary

Find the following words in the passage and select the meaning you think is *most likely* to correspond among the choices given.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 <i>rate</i> (line 2) | 3 <i>range</i> (line 7) |
| a) speed | a) distance |
| b) tax | b) variety |
| c) score | c) territory |
| d) awareness | d) farm |
| 2 <i>naturally</i> (line 4) | 4 <i>demanding</i> (line 14) |
| a) easily | a) difficult |
| b) unfortunately | b) questioning |
| c) without training | c) insisting |
| d) of course | d) asking |

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[More information](#)*Introductory passage 1*

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 5 <i>skim through</i> (line 17) | 8) <i>take in</i> (line 36) |
| a) read quickly through | a) understand |
| b) make smooth with | b) adjust |
| c) concentrate on | c) memorize |
| d) strain through | d) say |
| 6 <i>native</i> (line 20) | 9 <i>grasp</i> (line 37) |
| a) unsophisticated | a) grip tightly |
| b) primitive | b) understand |
| c) taught from childhood | c) hold loosely |
| d) uneducated | d) avoid |
| 7 <i>obstacles</i> (line 34) | 10 <i>italics</i> (line 42) |
| a) prohibitions | a) brackets |
| b) hindrances | b) margins |
| c) objections | c) sloping letters |
| d) disadvantages | d) smaller print |

Spot the topic

Which of the following choices a), b) or c), most adequately sums up the ideas of the *whole* paragraph?

- 1 *Para. 1* (lines 1–9)
 - a) How to increase your reading speed.
 - b) The advantages of a generally higher reading speed.
 - c) The advantages to your English of a higher reading speed.
- 2 *Para. 2* (lines 10–18)
 - a) The interest of the reading passages in this course.
 - b) Newspapers can be read more quickly than textbooks.
 - c) The speed at which you might expect to read different types of English.
- 3 *Para. 3* (lines 19–28)
 - a) How native English speakers read faster than others.
 - b) How speed reading courses affected students' reading speeds.
 - c) How native English university students increased their reading speed to 1000 w.p.m. on average.
- 4 *Para. 4* (lines 29–32)
 - a) A guide to the reading speed you could aim for.
 - b) The point of reading books of average difficulty.
 - c) Why further improvement is a good thing.
- 5 *Para. 6* (lines 35–end)
 - a) Advice on how to get the general idea of a piece of reading quickly.
 - b) The use of the title.
 - c) The disadvantage of too careful initial reading.

Introductory passage 2

Obstacles to faster effective reading

Perhaps you have seen very young children – or very old people – learning to read. They move the index finger along the line of print, pointing to each word, sometimes even to individual letters, saying the word or letters to themselves in a low voice. This is called ‘vocalizing’. Sometimes the learner makes no sound though his lips may move to form the words, sometimes there is not even any perceptible movement of the mouth at all, but the learner is still activating his throat muscles slightly to ‘say’ the words to himself. He is still vocalizing. 5

However slight the extent of vocalizing may be it will still be impossible for such a reader to reach a speed of more than about 280 w.p.m. The appreciation of written words must be entirely visual and we must read *more than one word at a time*. 10

Look at ‘you’, the second word of this passage. Even if you look straight at the ‘o’ of that word, without moving your eyes at all you can clearly see ‘perhaps’ and ‘have’ on either side. So you can read three words at once. Now look at the word ‘word’ on line 3. With a very slight movement of the eyes, you can take in the whole phrase ‘... saying the word or letters ...’ in the same glance. In the same way, you can probably take in a complete short sentence on one line, like the one on line 8, at one glance. None of the lines of print on a page this size should need more than three eye movements. Take line 6. This would perhaps break up into three word groups: (1) ... times there is not even ... (2) ... any perceptible movement ... (3) ... of the mouth at all, but ... When you are reading well, your eyes will be one or two word groups ahead of the one your mind is taking in. 25

Practise on something easy and interesting

Many students trying to increase their effective reading speed become discouraged when they find that if they try to race through a passage faster, they fail to take in what they have read. At the end, they have been so busy ‘reading faster’ that they cannot remember what the passage was about. The problem here is that the material they are practising on is either too difficult for them in vocabulary or content, or not sufficiently interesting. We hope that the passages in this course material will be both interesting and fairly easy, but you should also practise as much as you can in your own time. Read things you like reading. Go to the subject catalogue in the library. Biography, sport, domestic science, the cinema ... 35

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[More information](#)*Introductory passage 2*

there is bound to be some area that interests you and in which you can find books of about your level of ability or just below.

If you want a quick check on how easy a book is, read through three or four pages at random. If there are, on average, more than five or six words on each page that are completely new to you, then the book (though you may persevere with it for interest's sake) is not suitable for reading-speed improvement. Incidentally, you should try to read three or four times as much 'light' speed reading material (whether it is *Newsweek*, *The Saint* or *A Tale of Two Cities*) as you do close, slow textbook work. You cannot achieve a permanent improvement in your reading speed if most of the time you are practising reading slowly.

Ideas

Say whether the following statements are true or false according to the information given in the passage.

- 1 Very old people and very young children learn to read in much the same way.
- 2 Vocalizing will prevent readers from reading at speeds of over 100 w.p.m.
- 3 It is sometimes possible to see three words at once without moving the eyes.
- 4 To read well your eyes should be one or two word groups ahead of mind.
- 5 Some students get discouraged when they first start reading faster.
- 6 It is more important to read fast than to understand what is read.
- 7 Reading practice material should be interesting and not too hard.
- 8 It is impossible to check quickly how difficult a book is.
- 9 You should never read a book that has five or six new words per page.
- 10 *Newsweek*, *The Saint* and *A Tale of Two Cities* are unsuitable for students.

Vocabulary

Find the following words in the passage and select the meaning you think is *most likely* to correspond among the choices given.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 <i>index finger</i> (line 2) | 3 <i>activating</i> (line 7) |
| a) little finger | a) restraining |
| b) thumb | b) feeling |
| c) ring finger | c) operating |
| d) first finger | d) acting |
| 2 <i>perceptible</i> (line 6) | 4 <i>appreciation</i> (line 11) |
| a) observable | a) approval |
| b) loud | b) satisfaction |
| c) excessive | c) perception |
| d) piercing | d) increase |

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[More information](#)*Introductory passage 2*5 *glance* (line 18)

- a) look
- b) line
- c) breath
- d) stance

6 *discouraged* (line 27)

- a) interested
- b) disabled
- c) dissatisfied
- d) courageous

7 *race* (line 27)

- a) hurry
- b) compete
- c) concentrate
- d) read carefully

8 *content* (line 31)

- a) satisfaction
- b) ideas
- c) amount
- d) pleasure

9 *area* (line 36)

- a) space
- b) extent
- c) subject
- d) width

10 *persevere with* (line 41)

- a) try hard with
- b) dispense with
- c) dispose of
- d) despair of

Missing word summary

Fill in the numbered blanks from the selection of words given below. The correct choices will complete the sense of this summary of the reading passage.

You only read slowly if you [1] or look at individual words or letters. To improve reading speeds, your eye must [2] groups of words swiftly [3] your mind is absorbing the ideas. One [4] of practising faster reading is that you may not remember the ideas. This [5] be because the English is too [6] for this type of practice. Choose a book with, on average [7] than six new words per page.

- 1 a) glance
b) vocalize
c) pronunciation

- 5 a) is
b) has
c) may

- 2 a) take in
b) take over
c) take on

- 6 a) easy
b) difficult
c) unlikely

- 3 a) unless
b) while
c) after

- 7 a) fewer
b) more
c) at least

- 4 a) advantage
b) method
c) danger

Introductory passage 3

Hints for reading practice (part 1)

Set aside time each day

Most of us can find 15 minutes or half an hour each day for some specific regular activity. It may be a free period or a regular wait, say in the queue for a bus or meal – even while eating breakfast. One famous surgeon always made it a rule to spend at least 15 minutes on general reading before he went to sleep each night. Whether he went to bed at 10 p.m. or 2.30 a.m. made no difference. Even if you cannot keep to this kind of discipline, it is a good idea to make sure you always have a general interest book in your pocket. Don't forget it should be a book which entertains you and the English must not be too difficult for you. 5

Check your progress through pacing

Nearly all 'speed reading' courses have a 'pacing' element – some timing device which lets the student know how many words a minute he is reading. You can do this simply by looking at your watch every 5 or 10 minutes and noting down the page number you have reached. Check the average number of words per page for the particular book you are reading. How do you know when 5 minutes have passed on your watch if you are busy reading the book? Well, this is difficult at first. A friend can help by timing you over a set period, or you can read within hearing distance of a public clock which strikes the quarter hours. Pace yourself every three or four days, always with the same kind of easy, general interest book. You should soon notice your habitual w.p.m. rate creeping up. 10 15 20

Check comprehension

Obviously there is little point in increasing your w.p.m. rate if you do not understand what you are reading. When you are consciously trying to increase your reading speed, stop after every chapter (if you are reading a novel) or every section or group of ten or twelve pages (if it is a textbook) and ask yourself a few questions about what you have been reading. If you find you have lost the thread of the story, or you cannot remember clearly the details of what was said, re-read the section or chapter. 25

*Introductory passage 3**'Lightning speed' exercise*

Try this from time to time. Take four or five pages of the general interest book you happen to be reading at the time. *Read them as fast as you possibly can.* Do not bother about whether you understand or not. Now 30
go back and read them at what you feel to be your 'normal' w.p.m. rate, the rate at which you can comfortably understand. After a 'lightning speed' read through (probably around 600 w.p.m.) you will usually find that your 'normal' speed has increased – perhaps by as much as 50–100 w.p.m. 35
This is the technique athletes use when they habitually run further in training than they will have to on the day of the big race.

Ideas

Select the answer which is most accurate according to the information given in the passage.

- 1 The passage recommends setting aside for reading practice
 - a) two hours a day.
 - b) one hour a day.
 - c) 15 minutes or half an hour a day.
 - d) three times a day before meals.

- 2 One famous surgeon always made it a rule to read
 - a) for 15 minutes at 10 p.m. each night.
 - b) at least 15 minutes at bedtime.
 - c) at least 15 minutes at either 10 p.m. or 2.30 a.m.
 - d) whenever he had a spare moment.

- 3 It is a good idea always to carry in your pocket
 - a) a book you will never forget.
 - b) a serious book.
 - c) several books of various kinds.
 - d) an easy and entertaining English book.

- 4 A 'pacing' device
 - a) times a student's reading speed.
 - b) is not included in most speed reading courses.
 - c) is an aid to vocabulary learning.
 - d) should be used whenever we read alone.

- 5 Looking at your watch every 5 or 10 minutes
 - a) avoids the need for reading faster.
 - b) is not the same as pacing.
 - c) is not easy at first.
 - d) helps you to remember the page number you were at last time.

- 6 The passage recommends pacing yourself
 - a) every two days with different kinds of book.