

Additional Practice Material:

Reading has no speed limits

Being able to speed-read will help you raise your productivity

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WE are faced with increasing volume of reading materials in the workplace today. They include journals, reports and e-mail messages.

Being able to read fast is a useful skill that can help you to finish your work earlier, and allow you to devote more time to other areas such as planning and decision-making.

Speed-reading is a technique that you can acquire anytime. What you need is commitment and confidence in yourself.

The average person reads approximately 220 to 240 words per minute. This is because our eye takes approximately one-fourth of a second to register an image.

Therefore, if we see one word in a one-fourth of a second, in one second we will see about four words, depending on the length of each word.

It is possible to increase the number of words that we see in a single glance if we acquire some essential techniques in speed-reading.

Use your finger

One of the most effective techniques of speed-reading is to use your finger. Our eye has an innate tendency to follow a moving object.

When you move your finger across a row of words, you will find that your eye will also follow the movement of your finger and capture the words that you are reading at a faster pace. Vary the speed of your moving finger until you find you are comfortable with the pace of reading.

Initially, this exercise might seem a bit irritating, and that is a good sign. Speed-reading is similar to riding a bicycle or driving a car. It is a skill that you need to engage in actively. It becomes easier once you get used to it.

Peripheral vision

This is a slightly more challenging technique, but once you master it, you will realise that you can read at a speed exceeding 1,000 words per minute. For this technique, instead of looking at one word at a time, try looking at a few words at a time.

A newspaper is the best thing to use to practise this technique. Most newspapers in the world are divided into columns. The average lines in a column consist of four to six words. What most readers do is to read every word in the sentence. Thus, their eye movement is restricted to each word.

What you need to do is put your finger somewhere in the centre of each sentence and stretch your vision as much as you can to capture as many words as possible.

You will notice that your eyes are actually engineered to see more than a word at a glance. Initially, this technique might slow down your reading speed. However, as you become more accustomed to it, you will start reading faster and better.

Skimming and scanning

The trick to reading faster is "adaptive reading". This means that you should learn to skim through the article and pick out key words that are important. Again, this is not a big problem for most people, especially if you are reading articles that you are familiar with.

For example, if you have bought a new DVD recorder and want to know how to use the recording function, you will not read the whole manual. Instead, you will skip to the portion on recording.

Scanning is a technique that is useful for reading newspapers, magazines, e-mails and Internet webpages. Like a scanner, your eyes will sweep through the text and look out for information that you want.

Practice makes perfect

Learning to speed-read will help you to improve your vocabulary and increase your general knowledge. Like any new skill, do not expect to learn to speed-read overnight. You need patience and, most importantly, discipline in practicing the techniques. For a start, try re-reading this article again using your finger and see how fast you progress.

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