

Basics

Speed-reading is just that – reading a text very quickly. With normal reading, we tend to read 200–250 words per minute. Speed-reading can allow us to process over 700 words per minute! It involves looking at words on a page in a different way so that we can get to the information we need. Since we all read in different ways, different speed-reading techniques work better with each individual. Techniques and strategies include *skimming* and *scanning*, which you have already practised throughout your English studies.

The academic context

When we have to do a lot of reading as part of our studies, we need to do it quickly so that we can cover all the material. Speed-reading goes hand-in-hand with the ability to **Evaluate texts**. Imagine you are in a library or a bookshop and you are faced with many books on the subject you are studying. You can't take them all home, so speed-reading helps you evaluate which books are useful for your studies. Then, when you find a useful book, you realize you don't need all the information in it. Here, speed-reading helps again, because you can quickly find the information you need and mark it for closer study.

Key features

Key strategies for speed-reading include:

- Predicting – using headings, bylines and even photos or diagrams to help identify the context.
- Skimming a text – reading to get the gist of it and to build up a mind map of what it contains.
- Scanning – looking for key words or key information that is relevant to your needs.
- Metaguiding – using a pen, pencil, finger or other object to follow the flow of writing.
- Avoiding subvocalization – subvocalization is the natural tendency to sound out individual words in your head. This is best avoided when speed-reading.

The **Worksheet** presents a variety of strategies for you to try so you can see what suits you best.

Challenges / difficulties

Some people find it very difficult to learn new techniques for reading. This is not surprising because we have been reading since we were very young children, and speed-reading requires us to 'unlearn' some of those basic reading skills.

As you might imagine, the faster you read, the more information you are likely to miss. Reading very fast has no benefit if you don't remember anything. One challenge is to reach the fastest speed possible while still being able to remember all the important information.

How can I develop this skill?

As is the case with many skills, it takes practice. Try out the techniques in the **Worksheet** and see what works best for you. Another thing that will help you develop your skill of speed-reading is to time yourself. If you regularly set a time limit for how long you're planning to spend reading a text, you will see how your speed increases with practice. Remember that people who speed-read whole books often say that they only read the first and the last sentence of each paragraph. These will certainly give you a very good idea of the contents. You can always go back and read for detail if you find something important.

Learning outcome

Once you have learned to speed-read, you will be able to make more effective use of the time you spend studying. You will cover more material and, as a consequence, get more information in a shorter time.

Theory to practice

Time yourself. Spend no more than 30 seconds reading this text. Then cover it and answer the questions.

How much of a country's territory extends out to sea?

Where a law applies to a country, state or territory, it also applies to its territorial seas. The amount of sea 'owned' by a country is measured from the baseline. This is considered to be the average low-water mark along the coast or an imaginary line across a river estuary. Where the coast is very deeply indented, or where there are lots of islands near the coast, a straight baseline is established. From this line, we measure 12 nautical miles out to sea, and anything within those 12 miles is considered to be on that country's territory. If the distance across the water to another country is less than 24 nautical miles (i.e. $12 + 12$), then each country's territorial seas extend to the half-way point between the two countries. Establishing who owns territorial seas is important for many reasons, for example, military exercises, ownership disputes over islands, oil drilling rights, customs controls and fishing rights.

- 1 Did you read the heading? What is the text about, roughly? _____
- 2 Do you have a general idea of what a *baseline* is? _____
- 3 What are the main reasons we need to establish ownership of territorial seas? _____
- 4 Do you think you could improve on 30 seconds and read this text faster? _____
- 5 Do you now know where to look in the text to find specific answers if you need them? _____

Ways to get more practice

Try out the different strategies on the **Worksheet**. As mentioned above, time yourself – allowing a limited time to read a text. If you haven't found the key information, give yourself a little more time until you get better at speed-reading (you will get better by reading more texts). Practise speed-reading newspaper/magazine articles as often as you can.