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**Module: Study Skills**  
**Lesson 13: Speed Reading**

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**Level: 1<sup>st</sup> Year/ All groups**

Many students tend to read everything at the same rate (speed). However, fluent readers adjust their reading speed according to the material that they are reading and their purpose for reading it. As your speed reading skills improve, you will also train yourself to focus in on important details within the reading material. You will begin to retain more of the material that you read, and find time to continue doing the things that were preventing you from reading more in the past.

### **1/ Why Reading Faster?**

As a student, you may find these three reasons for learning to read faster worth considering:

- (a) You will get through required reading more efficiently; you will get your work done more quickly and have time for others things, including some pleasure reading.
- (b) You will enjoy your reading books more and so you will read more.
- (c) You will improve your comprehension; according to research, on different comprehension tests speed-readers score significantly higher (15 to 20 %) than their previous scores before they learned to speed-read.

### **2/ Factors Contributing to a Reduced Reading Rate**

Do you ever wonder why some people can go through books so rapidly, and others take much longer to finish a thin paperback novel? It is usually believed that students form *bad reading habits* at early stages of learning that they carry on to more advanced stages. However, many other factors can contribute to a reduced reading rate:

- Faulty eye movements, inaccuracy in placement of the eye while reading.
- Regression, or the re-reading of material already read.
- Limited perception span leading to word-by-word reading.
- Vocalization, the process of putting sounds to words you read.
- The false belief that slow reading leads to better comprehension.
- Poor evaluation regarding the relevant parts of the reading material.
- Lack of concentration.
- Translating into your native language as you read in English.

### **3/ Strategies to Increase your Reading Speed**

#### **Strategy 1: Check your reading habits**

Certain learning habits can slow you down. So, avoid the reading behaviours you have used for many years and be ready to try new ones that help you read more quickly and effectively.

## **Strategy 2: Read meaningful phrases or "chunks"**

The connection between the first two advantages of reading faster, stated above, are obvious; however, the connection between reading faster and better comprehension may not be so clear, but it is no less important. When you read slowly, you read one word at a time, like this:

Teenagers are not the only ones to be tempted  
by fast food. Apparently, pigeons also find the salty,  
fatty meals very attractive. Reports suggest that city  
pigeons are eating leftovers found in trash cans  
or outside fast-food restaurants, and as a result  
they are becoming overweight. Soon they will not  
be able to sit on power lines without the  
risk of breaking the lines and causing shortages.

Reading separate words this way makes it hard to understand what you read because you must remember each word as a separate piece of information. By the time you get to the end of a sentence, you may have forgotten the beginning. However, if you read faster, you can read groups of words together. Then you can think about ideas and not just single words. That is why you understand better and remember more.

Good readers read meaningful groups of words, which are much easier to remember than many separate words. Furthermore, when reading in **chunks**, they can form connections among the ideas in the text and with information or ideas, they know.

**- Read the same paragraph divided into meaningful chunks.**

Teenagers are not the only ones to be tempted by fast food.  
Apparently, pigeons also find the salty, fatty meals very attractive.  
Reports suggest that city pigeons are eating leftovers found in trash  
cans or outside fast-food restaurants, and as a result they are becoming  
overweight. Soon they will not be able to sit on power lines without the risk  
of breaking the lines and causing shortages.

## **Strategy 3: Skip over unknown/ unimportant words**

In order to read more quickly, good readers often skip many words. They skip over words they do not know. They also skip unimportant words. In fact, many words are not necessary for comprehension. You can get the general meaning without them.

- The newspaper article below has many words missing. Look at it carefully and see if you can answer the questions that follow:

## BRITISH COUPLE HURT IN EARTHQUAKE

Greece ..... walking ..... cliffs ..... island .....  
Lefkada ..... earthquake struck, ..... rocks.....on them.  
..... tremor, ..... 6.4 ..... Richter scale, ..... early  
Hours. .... hospital ..... Mr. Steen ..... blood transfusion  
..... breaking ..... leg. .... wife .....  
head injuries.

1- Where was the earthquake?

2- Was anyone hurt?

3- What were they doing when the earthquake struck?

4- How big was the tremor?

5- What treatment did Mr. Steen receive in hospital?

6- What injuries did his wife receive?

**How many did you answer correctly? .....**

### **Strategy 4: Practice reading faster by timing yourself**

Experts believe that a reading rate of less than 200-250 words per minute (WPM) almost certainly indicates word-by-word reading. Many students who have never worked on increasing their reading rate read at that rate. Others may already read at faster rates. Whatever your rate is now, experience has shown that students who regularly work on their reading rate can double it in one semester. Very often, this also leads to better academic performance.

To increase your reading speed, you can use a clock and time yourself. Then you can find out how fast you read, and you can try to push yourself to read faster. To calculate your speed in words per minute, take the following steps:

1- Count the number of words on **three** lines.

2- Divide that number of words by three to give you the average number of words per line.

3- Count the lines on the page.

4- (Number of lines) X (words on one line) = words on a page.

5- How many minutes did you take to read the page? ..... minutes

6- Number of words on a page = ..... Words Per Minutes (**wpm**)  
.....minutes

## **Practice**

**Task One:** Students usually find that they understand better when they read paragraphs divided into phrases. In reading, as in listening, it is easier for your brain to process information if it is divided into meaningful phrases.

*- Read the passage and then divide the sentences into meaningful phrases. Then read the paragraph several times focusing your eyes on each chunk.*

### **Cat Graves on Cyprus**

Archaeologists have found the earliest known evidence of a special connection between humans and cats. Last month in Cyprus they discovered the grave of a 30- year-old villager who died 9,500 years ago. With the body, they found jewelry, seashells, and other items. Less than a meter (3 feet) away, in another grave almost certainly made at the same time, lay the bones of a young cat.

Cat bones have been found before near early human settlements, but scientists believe they belonged to wild cats. These cats probably stayed around human villages to catch the mice and rats attracted by the supplies of food. The new find on Cyprus, however, seems to indicate that the cats in this village were tamed and had some special role to play in human activities or a special relationship with certain individuals. These bones showed no signs of having been butchered for eating. And since they were in the right places in the skeleton, the animal must have been buried soon after death; otherwise, the bones would have been taken by other animals.

Other animals were tamed before cats. The first dogs (actually a type of wolf) are known to have lived with humans as early as 15,000 years ago. Their importance in early human settlements is shown by the evidence of dog graves from 12,500 years ago in Israel. The goat was probably the first animal to produce milk for humans, around 10,000 years ago. But until now, the first evidence of household cats came from Egypt only 4,000 years ago. The discovery of the skeleton of this cat, which had clearly been handled with care, is very exciting for archaeologists.

**Task Two:** We often get meaning from a text by just reading the key words. Read the next part of the article and underline what you think the key words are.

At least 22 other people are hurt, including four rock climbers who fell into the sea and two Italian tourists hit by falling rocks. A bridge linking the island with the mainland was clogged by traffic as people tried to flee. (From Metro, 15 August 2003)

**Task Three:** In this paragraph, every fifth word is missing. Read the paragraph and answer the questions. Do NOT try to guess the missing words. Do not stop when you come to an unknown word. In some cases, knowing the meaning of the word will not be necessary for understanding the important ideas in the passage.

Anna Polanski, the famous.....pianist, moved to the ..... States five years ago. ....year, she plays a free .....and she invites her....., friends, fans, and the .....from a local school. ....week, her annual concert ..... held at the University .....Centre, and her invited ..... included the children from .....Park School in Roxbury. ....this event, Ms. Polanski ..... to play the music .....Chopin, including his most ..... composition, the Polonaise. ....her audience enjoyed all .....the pieces she played, ..... responded most to a .....of lively marches and..... that she played at.....end of the concert. ....the concert, several children ..... to the stage and .....Ms. Polanski with bouquets of .....

1. Was Anna Polanski born in the United States? .....
2. How often does she give free concerts? .....
3. Whom does she invite to concerts? .....
4. What did the audience enjoy most? .....
5. What did the children give Ms. Polanski? .....

**Task Four:** Regular practice in reading against the clock is the best way to increase your reading rate. In the passages below, you will time yourself as you read them and then answer the questions.

#### Passage A

Starting Time .....

Rosebud is a small town in New Jersey. It looks like many other towns in the United States. On Main Street, there is a post office and a police station. The drugstore and the library are down the street. There is also a shopping centre. It has a supermarket and a department store. Rosebud is a quiet place, not very rich or poor. But the town is growing. There are new houses every year. It is a popular place to live because it is near New York City. Many people live in Rosebud and work in New York.

Finishing Time .....

#### Passage B

Starting Time .....

In the middle of Rosebud, N.J., near the post office, is the office of Dr. Sam Diamond. Everybody in town knows Dr. Diamond. He's a very good dentist. He's also a popular person. He likes to tell funny stories to his patients. They forget about teeth when they listen to him. On the weekends,

Dr. Diamond likes to go to basketball games. Sometimes he also watches sports on TV. But his favourite activity is fishing. Every Saturday in the summer, he gets up early in the morning. He and his friends spend the day fishing at Lake Massapog.

**Finishing Time .....**

**Passage C**

**Starting Time .....**

Dr. Diamond is married to Susan Diamond. She is a scientist with a Ph.D. in chemistry. She works in a laboratory in New York City. She and some other scientists are studying the air over the city. They want to find a way to make the air cleaner. Every morning, Susan takes the train to New York. She sees the dirty air. She also sees the dirt and garbage on the streets. She is glad she lives in New Jersey, and not in New York. The Diamonds' house has a back yard with trees and beautiful flowers. Susan's favourite activity is working in her garden.

**Finishing Time .....**

**- Do not look back ! Circle the best answer.**

**(A)**

**1/ This passage is about:**

- a. New York city
- b. Towns
- c. Rosebud, N,J
- d. A quiet place

**2/ Rosebud is:**

- a. Like many other American town.
- b. Not like many other American towns.
- c. A noisy place
- d. A large city

**3/ Every year Rosebud:**

- a. Has fewer houses
- b. Is like other American towns
- c. Has noisy streets
- d. Has more houses

**4/Many people want to live in Rosebud because**

- a. It is growing
- b. It is a quiet place
- c. It near New York City
- d. It is popular

(B)

**1/ This passage is about:**

- a. A dentist
- b. What Dr. Diamond likes to do
- c. Dr. Sam Diamond
- d. Fishing

**2/ Dr. Diamond is popular because**

- a. Everyone in town knows him
- b. He listens to his patients
- c. He tells his patients funny stories.
- d. He likes to go fishing

**3/ Fishing is Dr. Diamond's**

- a. Job
- b. Dream
- c. Favourite free time activity

**4/ Dr. Diamond likes to be**

- a. With his friends
- b. Alone
- c. Quiet
- d. A patient

(C)

**1/ This passage is about:**

- a. Dr. Diamond
- b. Scientists
- c. The city and the country
- d. Susan Diamond

**2/ Susan Diamond thinks New York**

- a. B. Is a nice city
- b. Is a clean city
- c. Is a busy city
- d. Has dirty air and streets

**3/Rosebud is:**

- a. Dirtier than New York
- b. Cleaner than New York
- c. Crowded

- d. Not a good place to live

**4/ Susan's favourite activity is:**

- a. Taking the train to New York City
- b. Working in the laboratory
- c. Working in the garden
- d. Fishing

**- Now fill in the information. You can find your Reading Rate on the chart below.**

**Passage A**

Finishing time .....min .....sec

– Starting time .....min.....sec

Reading time .....min. ....Sec. = Reading Rate .....  
(Words Per Minute “WPM”)

**Passage B**

Finishing time .....min .....sec

– Starting time .....min.....sec

Reading time .....min. ....Sec. = Reading Rate .....(WPM)

**Passage C**

Finishing time .....min .....sec

– Starting time .....min.....sec

Reading time .....min. ....Sec. = Reading Rate .....(WPM)

**Chart for Finding Reading Rate for  
Passages A, B, and C**

<u>Time</u> (Minutes: Seconds)	<u>Rate</u> (Words Per Minute)	<u>Time</u> (Min: Sec)	<u>Rate</u> (Words Per Minute)
:10	625	2:10	46
:20	303	2:20	43
:30	200	2:30	40
:40	151	2:40	38
:50	125	2:50	36
1:00	100	3:00	33
1:10	86	3:10	32
1:20	75	3:20	30
1:30	66	3:30	29
1:40	60	3:40	27
1:50	54	3:50	26
2:00	50	4:00	25