



In contrast to reading strategies that aim to improve your comprehension (e.g., active reading, SQ3R, critically reading), speed reading strategies aim to improve your reading rate. Skimming & scanning, as well as paying attention to structural cues in a text or looking for pivotal words can all increase your reading speed.

## Skimming & Scanning

Skimming and scanning are reading techniques that use keywords to move quickly through a text for slightly different purposes.

**Skimming** is a process of reading to get an overall view or get an impression of the content. This is when you pick out the main ideas or messages from headings, images, graphs, etc. Skimming covers the entire reading material to identify parts that might contain relevant information and parts that may not. Use skimming in previewing (reading before you read), reviewing (reading after you read), or to decide if you need to read something at all, for example during the preliminary research for a paper.

**Scanning** requires you to look for a particular word or phrase. You can totally ignore unnecessary ones. Scanning helps you find specific facts or a particular piece of information, e.g. an answer to a question, a key word or a phrase. **Only** scan when you know what to scan. Use scanning in research to find particular facts, to study fact-heavy topics, and to answer questions requiring factual support.

**Skimming and Scanning are close friends!**

**They are best together!**

## Skimming Strategies

- Do not read every word.
- Read the table of contents or chapter overview to learn the main organization of ideas.
- Start by reading main headings, titles and subtitles.
- Tables, charts and pictures have headings, too.
- Next, focus on beginnings & endings, e.g.
  - Read first and last sentences of paragraphs.
  - Read first and last paragraphs of major sections.
- Look for typographical cues:
  - bold and italic
  - indenting, bulleted and numbered lists
  - highlights
- Use cues like signal words and phrases (nouns, dates, events, names).
- Look for breaks in the texts (indicating a change in subject, providing a list or summary, etc.)
- Look out for keywords
  - words that are repeated throughout
  - or words like "causes," "results," "effects," etc.,
  - or signal words such as those suggesting controversy ("versus", "pros and cons")
  - names of people and places, dates, nouns, and unfamiliar words
- When you think you have found something significant, slow down to read the entire sentence to make sure. Resist the temptation to stop to read details you don't need.
- Underline or highlight
- At the end of a section, summarize the main idea in 3 bullet points
- At the end of the reading, summarize, in your own words, the main arguments of the reading when you are done

While skimming is always faster than your normal reading speed, you should slow down in the following situations:

- When you skim introductory and concluding paragraphs
- When you skim topic sentences
- When you find an unfamiliar word
- When the material is very complicated

## Scanning Strategies

- In case there are not any given keywords, establish them. For example, choose your keywords from a question posed by you, in the course syllabus or by a professor.
- Choose a few words or phrases to search for in the reading.
- Look for only one keyword at a time.
- If you use multiple keywords, do multiple scans.
- Use a finger of your hand to scan
- Repeat silently in your mind the keywords while scanning.
- Highlight or underline key words.
- When you come across a keyword while scanning, stop, and carefully read the surrounding text.
- Don't forget to scan tables of contents, summaries, indexes, headings, and typographical cues.

To finally master the techniques of skimming and scanning, you have to **spend your time practicing again and again**. To choose an appropriate technique, come back to your purpose and motivation. For example, the end-goal could be to have a good enough understanding of the text to be able to discuss it in class with confidence.

## **Not sure how fast you should read? *Vary your reading rate!***

**Decrease speed** when you find the following:

- An unfamiliar word not made clear by the sentence. Try to understand it from the way it's used; then read on and return to it later.
- Long and uninvolved sentence and paragraph structure. Slow down enough to enable you to untangle them and get an accurate idea of what the passage says.
- Unfamiliar or abstract ideas. Look for applications or examples which will give them meaning. Demand that an idea "make sense." Never give up until you understand, because it will be that much easier the next time. Find someone to help you if necessary.
- Detailed, technical material. This includes complicated directions, abstract principles, materials on which you have scant background.
- Material on which you want detailed retention. The key to memory is organization and recitation. Speed should not be a consideration here.

**Increase speed** when you find the following:

- Simple material with few ideas new to you. Move rapidly over the familiar.
- Unnecessary examples and illustrations. If not needed, move over them rapidly.
- Detailed explanation and elaboration which you do not need.
- Broad, generalized ideas.

## Not sure what to look out for? *Pay attention to pivotal words!*

- **Additive words:** "Here's more of the same coming up. It's just as important as what we have already said."
  - Also, further, moreover, and, furthermore, too, besides, in addition
- **Equivalent words:** "It does what I have just said, but it does this too."
  - As well as, at the same time, similarly, equally important, likewise
- **Amplification words:** "I want to be sure that you understand my idea; so here's a specific instance."
  - For example (e.g.), specifically, as, for instance, such as, like
- **Alternative words:** "Sometimes there is a choice; other times there isn't."
  - Either/or, other than, neither/nor, otherwise
- **Repetitive words:** "I said it once, but I'm going to say it again in case you missed it the first time."
  - Again, in other words, to repeat, that is (i.e.)
- **Contrast and Change words:** "So far I've given you only one side of the story; now let's take a look at the other side."
  - But, on the contrary, still, conversely, on the other hand, though, despite, instead of, yet, however, rather than, regardless, nevertheless, even though, whereas, in spite of, notwithstanding
- **Cause and effect words:** "All this has happened; now I'll tell you why."
  - Accordingly, since, then, because, so, thus, consequently, hence, therefore, for this reason
- **Qualifying words:** "Here is what we can expect. These are the conditions we are working under."
  - If, although, unless, providing, whenever
- **Concession words:** "Okay! We agree on this much."
  - accepting the data, granted that, of course
- **Emphasizing words:** "Wake up and take notice!"
  - above all, more important, indeed
- **Order words:** "You keep your mind on reading: I'll keep the numbers straight."
  - Finally, second, then, first, next, last
- **Time words:** "Let's keep the record straight on who said what and especially when."
  - Afterwards, meanwhile, now, before, subsequently, presently, formerly, ultimately, previously, later
- **Summarizing words:** "We've said many things so far. Let's stop here and pull them together."
  - for these reasons, in brief, in conclusion, to sum up

### **Resources:**

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/learning-resources/learning-strategies/reading-techniques>

<https://ejoy-english.com/blog/differences-between-skimming-and-scanning>

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