

# Speed-reading

With all the information  
careering toward us  
on paper and on screens,  
it's hard to keep pace.

Abby Marks Beale,  
creator of the Rev It Up  
Reading course and  
podcast, discusses how  
to absorb it more  
effectively.

## What kind of speed are we talking about when we say speed-reading?

The average person reads about 250 words a minute. I have had students be able to read double, even triple, that number.

## How much information do you really process while speed-reading?

You'd be surprised. Whether you're reading, running, or driving, the faster you go, the more you need to concentrate. And when you focus more, higher levels of comprehension can result. But it's not just about reading fast—it's about training your eyes and brain to take in information more efficiently.

## What's the easiest way to start?

Use a plain white card as a guide. Place the card above the text you're reading and push it line by line. It forces you to move down the page quickly so you can't go back to double-check.

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## What's next?

Break out of reading word for word, and broaden your peripheral vision to see more words at a glance. One way to do this is to just read keywords and add the little ones—*the, my, your*, and so on—in your head. This allows you to move faster without losing meaning. Phrasing is another tactic: Break a sentence into groups that belong together so you're reading several words at once. For example: "Some people" "aren't comfortable" "ordering online."

## It's difficult to understand what you're reading when you go so quickly.

That will change. In the beginning, practice without worrying about understanding. Soon the brain will catch on and say, "I get what you want me to do."

## Can you speed-read anything?

It doesn't lend itself to things like poetry, Old English, dense legal documents, or sections of dialogue. It works really well for fact-based reading—articles and work-related or academic material. The more familiar you are with a topic, the more likely you can speed through it.

## What are habits that slow down our reading?

Regression, when your eyes intentionally or unintentionally go back over what they've read to check that they got it right. Another one is subvocalization, which is sounding words out in your head as you read.

## What else?

Many of us waste too much time reading every little thing just because it's on the page. Instead, look for the meat to get the main idea. The biggest chunks can be found in the first sentence or two of each paragraph of non-fiction material.

## What are the optimal conditions for speed-reading?

The best place to practice is wherever your mind and body have been conditioned to work. For most people, that's sitting upright at a desk or table, with the material on the table, not your lap.

## Do you have to be a strong reader to learn speed-reading?

No, I actually used to be a slow reader. But it definitely helps if you have a good vocabulary.

## Does taking a class help?

I recommend taking an online course to learn the strategies inside and out. You could also practice with a digital program, like Spreeder.com, which helps the eyes and brain process words quickly. Set it at 300 words per minute, then work up to 600. You'll get better faster when you push it. You could see a dramatic improvement within 10 days if you do speed-reading exercises for 10 minutes daily.

## How do you measure your reading speed?

Test your speed and comprehension at projects. [wsj.com/speedread](http://wsj.com/speedread).



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