



Speed Reading Starter Guide

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Introduction

Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of reading you need to do? Do you have a stack of books waiting to be read? What if you could read it all 2-5 times faster with better comprehension? How much time would save? How much more could you get done? How would that impact your career?

If you're new to speed reading, this is the perfect place to start. This book will help you learn the basics of speed reading to help you read more in less time.



As founder and Program Director of Iris Reading, I want to personally thank you for investing your time in our program. Iris Reading is the largest and leading provider of speed-reading training in the U.S. Our workshops have been taught to thousands of students at prestigious universities that include Harvard, Stanford and the University of Chicago. We've also provided speed-reading training to employees of NASA, Google, Walmart and many other Fortune 500 companies.

If you're thirsty for knowledge, speed reading is one the best skills you can learn to acquire. Learning to read faster will enable you to consume more information than ever before. A faster reading speed will help you save a ton of time. If you're a student, you'll find it easier to keep up with your textbooks and you'll get better grades. If you're done with school and looking to advance your career, speed reading will enable you to get more done in less time. You'll have an edge on the competition and this will help advance your career. I really hope you find these skills as useful as I have found them.

If you'd like to connect with me on the web, feel free to do so through the following links:

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/paulnowak](https://www.linkedin.com/in/paulnowak)

Facebook: [facebook.com/nowak.paul](https://www.facebook.com/nowak.paul)

Twitter: twitter.com/paul_nowak

Thanks for reading,

Paul Nowak

Founder & Program Director

Iris Reading

How Fast Do You Currently Read?

Before we begin improving our reading speed, it's important to know exactly where we are starting. Let's get started right now by testing your current reading speed.

Your reading speed is measured in words per minute (WPM). To find out your reading speed, we are simply going to read for one minute and then figure out how many words were read during that minute of reading.



To accurately test your reading speed, you will need a timer that counts down. If you don't have a timer, you can use this online timer: www.online-stopwatch.com/full-screen-stopwatch

While you are reading, make sure that you go at whatever speed feels comfortable so that you are achieving a maximum amount of comprehension. Don't go any faster than you normally would, and don't go any slower than you normally would.

When you are done reading, you will need to calculate your reading speed. If you would like to calculate this quickly, count the number of lines that you read and multiply that number by 12 (the average number of words per line in this book).

If you want to be precise and find out your exact speed, count every single word that you read during that minute. Because the process of counting every word can take some time, you will notice that throughout this book, we will ask you to calculate your reading speed by multiplying the number of lines read by the average number of words per line. In this book, there are an average of 12 words per line.

Let's get started. Set your countdown timer for one minute. When you are ready, start your timer and begin reading the passage on the next page for one minute. When you are done reading, calculate your reading speed and take note of it. Go ahead and begin the reading on the next page when you are ready.

***Animal Farm* by George Orwell – Passage from Chapter 1**

Mr. Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes. With the ring of light from his lantern dancing from side to side, he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots at the back door, drew himself a last glass of beer from the barrel in the scullery, and made his way up to bed, where Mrs. Jones was already snoring.

As soon as the light in the bedroom went out there was a stirring and a fluttering all through the farm buildings. Word had gone round during the day that old Major, the prize Middle White boar, had had a strange dream on the previous night and wished to communicate it to the other animals. It had been agreed that they should all meet in the big barn as soon as Mr. Jones was safely out of the way. Old Major (so he was always called, though the name under which he had been exhibited was Willingdon Beauty) was so highly regarded on the farm that everyone was quite ready to lose an hour's sleep in order to hear what he had to say.

At one end of the big barn, on a sort of raised platform, Major was already ensconced on his bed of straw, under a lantern which hung from a beam. He was twelve years old and had lately grown rather stout, but he was still a majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance in spite of the fact that his tushes had never been cut. Before long the other animals began to arrive and make themselves comfortable after their different fashions. First came the three dogs, Bluebell, Jessie, and Pincher, and then the pigs, who settled down in the straw immediately in front of the platform. The hens perched themselves on the window-sills, the pigeons fluttered up to the rafters, the sheep and cows lay down behind the pigs and began to chew the cud. The two cart-horses,

Boxer and Clover, came in together, walking very slowly and setting down their vast hairy hoofs with great care lest there should be some small animal concealed in the straw. Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle life, who had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal. Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high, and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together. A white stripe down his nose gave him a somewhat stupid appearance, and in fact he was not of first-rate intelligence, but he was universally respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work. After the horses came Muriel, the white goat, and Benjamin, the donkey. Benjamin was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered. He seldom talked, and when he did, it was usually to make some cynical remark — for instance, he would say that God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies. Alone among the animals on the farm he never laughed. If asked why, he would say that he saw nothing to laugh at. Nevertheless, without openly admitting it, he was devoted to Boxer; the two of them usually spent their Sundays together in the small paddock beyond the orchard, grazing side by side and never speaking.

The two horses had just lain down when a brood of ducklings, which had lost their mother, filed into the barn, cheeping feebly and wandering from side to side to find some place where they would not be trodden on. Clover made a sort of wall round them with her great foreleg, and the ducklings nestled down inside it and promptly fell asleep. At the last moment Mollie, the foolish, pretty white mare who drew Mr. Jones's trap, came mincing daintily in, chewing at a lump of sugar. She took a place near the front and began flirting her white mane, hoping to draw attention to the red ribbons it was plaited with. Last of all came the cat, who looked round, as usual, for the warmest place, and finally squeezed herself in between Boxer and Clover; there she purred

contentedly throughout Major's speech without listening to a word of what he was saying.

All the animals were now present except Moses, the tame raven, who slept on a perch behind the back door. When Major saw that they had all made themselves comfortable and were waiting attentively, he cleared his throat and began:

‘Comrades, you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night. But I will come to the dream later. I have something else to say first. I do not think, comrades, that I shall be with you for many months longer, and before I die, I feel it my duty to pass on to you such wisdom as I have acquired. I have had a long life, I have had much time for thought as I lay alone in my stall, and I think I may say that I understand the nature of life on this earth as well as any animal now living. It is about this that I wish to speak to you.

THE AVERAGE READING SPEED

How fast did you read? Again, to calculate your reading speed, multiply the number of lines read by 12 (the average number of words per line in this book). If you want to be precise, you can count every single word that you just read during that minute.

How does your reading speed compare with the average? If your reading speed was somewhere between 150 – 250 words per minute (WPM), then you are reading at average speed. Most people read 150-250 WPM. If your reading speed was below the average, don't feel discouraged! The improvements that you're about to make in reading speed and comprehension are significant enough that they'll land you far above the average, no matter where you start out.

If you happen to be reading faster than average, be sure to keep in mind that you can still continue making improvements in your reading speed. And remember that our goal will not only be to improve speed, but also comprehension and retention.

Although we just mentioned that the average reading speed is 150 – 250 WPM, there are a few things to keep in mind about this average. First, it's based on medium-level material. Generally, that means the material is not too easy and not too hard. If you're reading something more challenging, like a textbook, your reading speed will probably drop. Alternatively, if you were reading something simple, like a children's book, you would probably read it faster.

It's best to think of your reading speed as more of a range. You might read medium-level material at 200 WPM, technical material at 100 WPM and easy material at 300 WPM. So in this sce-

nario, your reading range is between 100 and 300 WPM. Our goal is simply to move this range higher.

It's also important to keep in mind that your reading speed fluctuates based on a variety of scenarios. For example, if you only slept for three hours last night, you'll probably be reading more slowly (or you may just fall asleep in your book). Your reading speed will also fluctuate based on your level of focus. If you feel extremely distracted, you'll definitely be reading more slowly than usual.

Another important thing to realize about the average reading speed (150 – 250 wpm) is that it's based on one minute. Why? Because researchers like to compare apples to apples. So whenever we, and other researchers measure reading speed, they do it based on one minute, to keep measurements consistent. Although it's good to keep the experiment consistent, the problem here is that most people don't read in one-minute spurts. Most people read for extended periods of time. If you're reading a magazine or newspaper article it could be just a few minutes. And if you're reading a long textbook chapter it might take you 30 minutes or an hour. What do you think happens to your reading speed when you read for an extended period of time? The longer you read, the more likely your reading speed will begin to slow down. If you read for an extended period of time, it's very likely that your reading speed would be markedly slower during the last few minutes of reading than the first few minutes.

Like many statistics, the average reading speed (150 – 250 WPM) is a little flawed because it doesn't take into account reading for more than a minute, or reading more challenging material. If we took realistic reading conditions into account, the average

reading speed would probably be lower than the generally accepted 150 -250 WPM average.

Also keep in mind that the reading speed you just measured for yourself does NOT represent how fast you read at every moment—it's only an indication of how fast you read medium-level material at this moment, with whatever level of focus you brought to the exercise.

COMPREHENSION

Let's take a moment to discuss comprehension. Comprehension is what you understand while you're reading the material. This is very different from retention, which is what you remember after you've already gained comprehension. Many people think comprehension and retention are one in the same, but they aren't.

Comprehension and retention are two separate skills. Comprehension is based on your understanding of the material in the present moment. Retention is what you remember later on. That retention could be one minute later, it could be a day later or a whole year later. Sometimes you have great comprehension at the present moment, but then later forget the material. Has this ever happened to you? This is a retention problem, not a comprehension problem.

In our effort to improve our overall reading efficiency we will work on both comprehension and retention. We just need to understand at the outset that they are two different skills.

What is the best way to objectively measure comprehension? It's a common question, but unfortunately, there is no perfect way to measure comprehension. Remember those standardized tests you had to take in the past? Remember reading a passage and

then having to answer question based on the passage? Many people assume that those tests measure comprehension when in fact they don't. The test asks you to remember what you read. That's a little different than what you were able to comprehend. Additionally, the test also grades you on how quickly you can find the answer to a question.

Sometimes, a standardized reading test can give you a false impression of someone's comprehension. My organization, Iris, does a lot of work with high schools throughout the U.S. Very often we're asked to work with high school students that are below average readers. I remember asking a principal how they determined which students were considered "below average." He confidently told me that they tested "comprehension" through a standardized test. He showed me one particular student's score. The student answered 19 questions correctly out of 38 questions. His "comprehension" score was 50 percent according the principal, which meant he was a below average reader. However, after looking at the student's test I noticed that he had only answered 20 questions. Out of the 20 questions he answered, 19 were correct. He just didn't finish the test and ran out of time, like many students do. Would anyone consider 19 out of 20 "below average" comprehension? This is one of many instances where a standardized reading test fails to accurately measure comprehension. Although it would be nice to have an objective measure of comprehension, it is something that is absolutely impossible to measure accurately. The very nature of comprehension makes it hard to measure because it is what you understand at the moment of reading.

It can also be easily argued that no two people ever have the same comprehension. Let's take for example George Orwell's classic novel, *Animal Farm*. If you've read it and are aware of the his-

torical context in which this book was written, you would easily be able to make connections between the story and what is happening in history at the time. But what if you asked a child to read this book? With a limited knowledge of history, would a child be able to make the same historical connections? Probably not. The child would still comprehend *Animal Farm*, but the comprehension would be very different from an adult who is more familiar with history.

If two people have a different understanding of the same book, how would you go about measuring comprehension accurately? You can easily see that comprehension by its very nature is impossible to measure accurately. Although comprehension is impossible to measure objectively, it's still important for us to try and improve it.

Now that we know our reading speed and understand how comprehension works, it's time to start improving it our reading ability. In the pages that follow, you'll learn tips, strategies and exercises to help you boost your reading speed with better comprehension and retention.

Common Reading Myths

Most readers labor under a set of mistaken beliefs about the nature of reading. These mistaken beliefs hold us back from reading quickly and efficiently. If we want to become faster, flexible and active readers, we need to untangle ourselves from these reading myths.

Most of us haven't questioned the nature of our reading ability. Many people assume that reading takes a lot of time, even though it doesn't have to. Many also assume that getting solid comprehension requires slow reading. Also not true.



Many people overlook the fact that reading is a skill, just like playing an instrument or a sport. Like any other skill, reading can be improved. The first step in improving reading ability is recognizing that reading is a learned skill, not an inborn talent. While some people may demonstrate a natural aptitude for reading, everyone can significantly improve their reading speed and comprehension level with practice.

The key to realizing our potential as fast, efficient readers is recognizing that the old reading habits that most of us unconsciously practice are actually unhelpful, misinformed myths that inhibit our ability to read quickly. We have to disengage ourselves from these habits if we want to improve our speed.

MYTH 1:

“The faster I read, the worse my comprehension gets. I will understand more if I slow down.”

Although there are some instances when slower reading is a good idea—like when you’re reading dense, technical material, or poetry—usually, slow reading is a sign of poor concentration, NOT of better comprehension. Slower readers usually have weak concentration, and this results in poor comprehension. Faster readers have sharper focus, and get through material quickly with better comprehension because they have maintain a high level of concentration while reading. Cultivating your concentration will allow you to read faster while maintaining—and probably improving—your comprehension.

MYTH 2:

“Every single word is important to the understanding of the text.”

Not true. Many of the words that you read express no meaning at all; they exist for grammatical purposes only. These words are like the scaffolding of the sentence structure—they hold the sentence up so it can express something, but they are unimportant in and of themselves.

Spending time conceptualizing these meaningless words impedes your reading speed and even your comprehension, as they grab focus from the meaningful words in the sentence and detract from a streamlined processing of important information.

Breaking our allegiance to this myth will involve focusing on the bigger picture, and untangling ourselves from the notion that in order to really ‘get’ the material, we need to spend time on each individual word on the page. Developing an intuitive sense of which words merit deeper attention and which words require only a brief glance of recognition is part of becoming a faster and more efficient reader, and it’s a skill that we’ll start to build by recognizing that not all words need to be read carefully. In fact, the most effective readers know that some words should be read lightly, with less attention paid to them.

If we’re going to significantly improve our reading speed and maintain good comprehension while doing so, we’re going have to change our perception of what reading is. We are no longer going to read for words; from now on, we’ll read for ideas. For most people, reading means going word-by-word, and if we want to become flexible, active and efficient readers, we have to change our approach. Getting caught in the details, and losing sight of the big picture, is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to faster reading.

MYTH 3:

“I have poor comprehension because I can’t remember what I just read.”

Being able to remember what you just read is a recall problem—not a comprehension problem. The nature of comprehension relates to what you understand at the present moment, while reading.

Recall refers to what you can remember after reading—whether it’s a month, a year, or just a moment afterwards. Most people have great comprehension and poor recall. Concentration helps facilitate recall, but the most effective tool in improving recall is repetition.

Multiple exposures to the material is the most effective way to improve retention and recall. Those multiple exposures to the material do not necessarily mean reading the material over and over again. You can get multiple exposures to the material by simply challenging yourself to recall the material by talking about it or taking notes. In this book, we’ll cover numerous reading strategies that will help improve your comprehension and retention.

MYTH 4: “I should understand and remember everything the first time through.”

If this were possible, it would be fantastic. Unfortunately, even for the most committed, focused readers, this expectation is completely unrealistic. Regardless of your reading speed, you will never comprehend and recall everything the first time you read.

Recall is a function of repetition, which involves repeated exposures to the material you intend to learn. Good comprehension can be achieved during the first read, but it’s also likely that, even

with solid concentration, you’ll need to revisit the material to ensure that you are fully familiar with any new information or concepts presented. Good notes, lectures, seminars and/or group discussion sessions reinforce the information you gained through reading.

MYTH 5: “There’s no need for me to improve my reading ability, I already read well.”

Reading is a skill like any other, and there is always room for improvement, even for those with a natural aptitude for reading. Above average readers can make significant improvements in their speed and comprehension through practice.

Research shows that certain drills utilizing quick eye movements can dramatically increase a person’s reading speed. What most readers accept as normal, or even fast, is not necessarily the maximum potential for that person.

The vast majority of readers are not aware of their potential for improvement. Once they gain confidence in their potential to improve, they make significant strides, starting from wherever they begin.

Three Old Reading Habits

If you want to read faster, you must change the way you currently read. In order to do so, you must distance yourself from those mistaken, unhelpful reading myths discussed earlier, and directly address the three old reading habits that drag down your reading speed.



OLD READING HABIT #1: FIXATION

Fixation is the habit of fixating your eyes on every single word on the page. This is something that most people do when they read – their eyes stop and go every time they see a new word. Making brief visual fixations on each word is normal for many because it is how we were originally taught to read.

Most people were taught to read on a word-by-word basis, sounding out each word as they read. This technique was well suited to our capabilities as beginning readers, but it doesn't match our abilities or needs as adults. Fixation is actually a roadblock to efficient reading.

We can save time and boost reading speed by cutting down on fixations by taking in groups of words at a glance. Reading groups of words is possible through the full use of your peripheral vision. We use our peripheral vision constantly—while driving, playing sports, or just walking down the street—but we tend to drop this ability when we read, instead adopting an unhelpful 'tunnel-vision' approach in which we zoom in on one word and then zoom in on the next.

This habit of fixating our eyes on each individual word often makes reading physically uncomfortable and tedious. You may notice discomfort if you read for long periods of time and this is usually because of the herky-jerky movement your eyes make as they read. You don't feel this discomfort while walking down the street, playing sports or driving because during these—and indeed, almost all—activities, you're using your peripheral vision and NOT the herky-jerky fixation approach.

Fixating word-by-word is an unhelpful and unnecessary visual habit that must change if we want to become faster, more effi-

cient readers. Luckily, with committed practice, this old reading habit can be changed.

OLD READING HABIT #2: REGRESSION

Regression is the habit of going back and re-reading passages that have already been read. The average person spends a third of their reading time going back and re-reading passages. This means that for every hour we spend reading, about twenty minutes was spent re-reading. If we want to cut down on this habit of regression, and become faster more efficient readers we'll need to improve our concentration.

Like fixation, the roots of regression can be traced back to when we first learned how to read. When we first learned how to read, we were taught to read word-by-word and to go back and read a word again if you mispronounced it the first time. While you probably have little trouble pronouncing the words that you read now, remnants of this habit remain.

Most readers will go back and re-read material if they felt even slightly confused about its meaning. It's important to understand that just because something isn't clear initially doesn't mean that it won't be clarified later. Sometimes, it's more important to move forward in the material, and trust that the murky details will be clarified later. Also keep in mind, that you always have the safety net of the text to go back to read for clarification if needed.

Besides a lack of concentration or poor comprehension, regression happens for other reasons, like gaps in readers' vocabulary or an author's poor presentation of ideas.

You will never completely eliminate the habit of regression. Inevitably, your concentration will waver, or you'll encounter a

complicated or poorly described concept. You may even encounter foreign vocabulary and you'll need to go back and re-read. A little regression is a good thing when it is efficiently done. You will often want to go back to re-read something of special interest, to clarify something, or to correct a first impression. Discouraging you from regression entirely is not our aim; we just want to reduce the overall amount of time you spend going back as a result of poor concentration. Regression made for the sake of understanding and verification is in most cases a good investment of time. As we move along through this course, you'll learn ways to improve your concentration so that you don't go back to re-read as often as you normally do.

OLD READING HABIT #3: SUBVOCALIZATION

The last and most disruptive old reading habit is subvocalization. This is the habit of sounding out words in your head as you read. Of the three old reading habits, subvocalization is the most difficult change.

Once again, this habit was learned early on. You were taught to read word-by-word, as we mentioned earlier. You were also taught to read by pronouncing the words out loud. After you reached a certain level of proficiency, you were then taught to read the words silently in your head. After all these years, you are probably still saying all the words silently in your head.

Why is this a problem? It's because you don't need to say a word in your head to understand what it means. Pronouncing the word in your head also slows down your reading rate.

As an experiment, you may want to try reading out loud for one minute. See how fast you read, when you are actually vocalizing the words out loud. This is your talking speed.

If you're like most people, you'll notice that your talking speed is between 150 and 250 words per minute. This is the exact same range as the average reading speed. Why? Think about it this way. If you say every single word in your head while reading, doesn't that mean you'll only read as fast as you talk? This is why the average reading speed and the average talking speed are exactly the same. It's because most people only read as fast as they talk. And this is precisely because of subvocalization, the habit of saying words in your head.

When you read out loud, there are two things going on in your brain. Part of your brain is trying to comprehend the text, the main ideas and the details, while another part of your brain is focused on pronouncing the words. These two brain functions aren't necessarily complementary. Saying the words out loud doesn't really help you understand them any better.

Have you ever had the following experience happen to you in school? Your teacher asks you to read something out loud in front class. You read the passage and then sit back expecting that your role was dutifully fulfilled. Just then, your teacher asks you to comment on the passage you just read. You suddenly realize that you have no idea what you just read. Your mind is completely blank and you can't remember anything you just read.

Why did this happen? It's because you were mainly focused on pronunciation while reading out loud, not necessarily comprehension. Can you get comprehension while reading out loud? Yes, you can, but it takes extra work. And just because you're saying the words in your head, it doesn't mean that you'll automatically get comprehension.

The problem with the habit of subvocalization is that it prevents you from reading any faster than you talk. Your thinking

speed is much faster than your talking speed. And this is precisely the reason why we need to get out of the habit of saying every single word in our head.

If auditory reassurance slows our reading and doesn't help with comprehension, why do we keep doing it? Habit. Many readers aren't even conscious that they sound the words out in their head, and once they recognize that they do, they simply assume that it's the only way to read.

Once they realize they're doing it, most people believe that it is absolutely necessary to say the words silently in their head in order to understand the material. However, it isn't necessary to say every word in your head. The brain can recognize and comprehend words the moment they become part of the visual field. When you see stop sign, do you sound out the word 'stop' in your head, or do you simply see the word and process its meaning, without any auditory reassurance? When you see brand marquees—Nike, Walmart, Starbucks—do you hear these words as you read them, or just register their meaning? Although road signs and brand marquees are often presented with a memorable visual image, you still read the word on the sign and have the experience of not hearing it sounded out in your head. Recognizing that you've already had the experience of seeing a word and instantly comprehending it, without sounding it out, is useful in that it helps you warm up to the idea that subvocalization is not completely necessary to get comprehension.

Our goal is to significantly reduce the number of times that you sound out words in your head. Keep in mind though, that no one has perfect vocabulary, and if you don't know a word, you might resort to sounding it out. As long as you make a significant

reduction to the habit of subvocalization, you'll see dramatic increases in speed.

How To Start Boosting Your Reading Speed

This chapter will discuss the first steps you will need to take in order to start reading faster. With just a little bit of practice, you can start reading faster in just a few minutes. Make sure that you follow the drills in this chapter to make your first improvement in your reading rate.



USE YOUR HAND TO READ FASTER

The simplest thing you can do to read faster right now is to start using your hand to guide your eyes. Because your eyes are naturally attracted to motion, they'll follow along the line as your hand moves from left to right. You can guide your eyes with your hand, your finger or a pen. Work with whatever what feels most comfortable.

The main reason you'll be using your hand is that our eyes are naturally attracted to motion. We're going to take advantage of this and use it to speed up our reading rate by taking a visual stimulant—our moving finger or pen—and encouraging our eyes to move through the words faster than normal.

READING FASTER BY PRACTICING SPEED DRILLS

In addition to using your hand as a pacer, we're going to start doing some practice speed drills. The more you practice these drills that faster you will start reading.

The goal of a “speed drill” is to purposely read faster than you normally would. In other words, you shouldn't expect a high level of comprehension when you are practicing speed drills because the goal is to go much faster than you normally read. Comprehension is irrelevant during these drills because you aren't working on that specific skill. During speed drills, you are singularly focused on speed, which is why you'll purposely want to go faster than normal.

Since you can't automatically turn off your ability to see words and immediately comprehend them, some of the words are still going to register with you. Other words will fly by your eyes, or blur together, and you might not understand them individually.

This is expected during speed drills, and totally acceptable. You're doing the drill effectively if your comprehension falls somewhere in the range of zero to twenty percent.

What's the point of seeing words quickly without understanding what they mean? The main reason this drill is effective is that it trains your eyes to see words much faster than they are accustomed to. The purpose of the drill is to habituate our eyes, on a purely mechanical level, to take in significantly more words than they're used to taking in. The logic here is that if we want to read faster, the first thing we have to do is learn how to see faster. We can't process information more quickly without first putting into place the essential skill of simply SEEING words more quickly. This speed drill is designed to train your eyes to see more in a shorter period of time—don't worry about comprehension during the exercise; as long as you're seeing the words at the prescribed speed, you're reaping the benefits.

When we read, we employ three distinct abilities: speed, comprehension, and recall. In order to become faster, more efficient readers, we need to improve each of these abilities. We could work on comprehension and recall strategies without improving our reading speed—but the point of this course is to become faster readers, so the first thing we need to work on is actually seeing words faster, so that we can read—and then comprehend, and recall—faster. We can't work on everything at once, so we'll work on these skills separately, and then tie everything together when we actually read for comprehension.

Here's the format of a basic speed drill. You read for a certain period of time, let's say 10 minutes. You then try to re-read that same material in less time. You want to get to same spot in less time by going faster than you previously read. So if you

started reading the material in 10 minutes, you then try to re-read it in 7 minutes. After that you continue decreasing the time. So you might re-read it again, but this time in 6 minutes; and then again, in 5 minutes. The whole point of the drill is go much faster than your normal reading speed, even if that means sacrificing a lot of comprehension.

Remember, you won't really be reading the words (for comprehension), but just seeing the words, with little-to-no comprehension. Re-reading in shorter periods of time will force your eyes to maintain a very fast pace. Try not to worry about comprehension. The point here is to get your eyes used to seeing faster so that down the line, you'll be able to read faster. Once we get used to seeing the words faster, we'll factor in comprehension and recall strategies—but first we have to take care of this fundamental skill.

Let's get started with our first speed drill. Make sure that you are using your hand to guide your eyes as you do each drill. You can use your own reading material or the sample pages that follow.

EXERCISE: GENERAL SPEED DRILL

Read at your regular reading speed (for good comprehension) for 10 minutes. Keep track of how far you read.

Re-read to the same spot in 7 minutes.

Re-read to the same spot in 6 minutes.

Re-read to the same spot in 5 minutes.

Re-read to the same spot in 4 minutes.

You can practice this drill in your own material or in the reading passage that follows.

Animal Farm by George Orwell – Chapter 1 & 2

Chapter 1

Mr. Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes. With the ring of light from his lantern dancing from side to side, he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots at the back door, drew himself a last glass of beer from the barrel in the scullery, and made his way up to bed, where Mrs. Jones was already snoring.

As soon as the light in the bedroom went out there was a stirring and a fluttering all through the farm buildings. Word had gone round during the day that old Major, the prize Middle White boar, had had a strange dream on the previous night and wished to communicate it to the other animals. It had been agreed that they should all meet in the big barn as soon as Mr. Jones was safely out of the way. Old Major (so he was always called, though the name under which he had been exhibited was Willingdon Beauty) was so highly regarded on the farm that everyone was quite ready to lose an hour's sleep in order to hear what he had to say.

At one end of the big barn, on a sort of raised platform, Major was already ensconced on his bed of straw, under a lantern which hung from a beam. He was twelve years old and had lately grown rather stout, but he was still a majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance in spite of the fact that his tushes had never been cut. Before long the other animals began to arrive and make themselves comfortable after their different fashions. First came the three dogs, Bluebell, Jessie, and Pincher, and then the pigs, who settled down in the straw immediately in front of the platform. The hens perched themselves on the window-sills, the pigeons fluttered up to the rafters, the sheep and cows lay down

behind the pigs and began to chew the cud. The two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover, came in together, walking very slowly and setting down their vast hairy hoofs with great care lest there should be some small animal concealed in the straw. Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle life, who had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal. Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high, and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together. A white stripe down his nose gave him a somewhat stupid appearance, and in fact he was not of first-rate intelligence, but he was universally respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work. After the horses came Muriel, the white goat, and Benjamin, the donkey. Benjamin was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered. He seldom talked, and when he did, it was usually to make some cynical remark — for instance, he would say that God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies. Alone among the animals on the farm he never laughed. If asked why, he would say that he saw nothing to laugh at. Nevertheless, without openly admitting it, he was devoted to Boxer; the two of them usually spent their Sundays together in the small paddock beyond the orchard, grazing side by side and never speaking.

The two horses had just lain down when a brood of ducklings, which had lost their mother, filed into the barn, cheeping feebly and wandering from side to side to find some place where they would not be trodden on. Clover made a sort of wall round them with her great foreleg, and the ducklings nestled down inside it and promptly fell asleep. At the last moment Mollie, the foolish, pretty white mare who drew Mr. Jones's trap, came mincing daintily in, chewing at a lump of sugar. She took a place near the front and began flirting her white mane, hoping to draw attention to the red ribbons it was plaited with. Last of all came the cat, who looked round, as usual, for the warmest place, and finally

squeezed herself in between Boxer and Clover; there she purred contentedly throughout Major's speech without listening to a word of what he was saying.

All the animals were now present except Moses, the tame raven, who slept on a perch behind the back door. When Major saw that they had all made themselves comfortable and were waiting attentively, he cleared his throat and began:

‘Comrades, you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night. But I will come to the dream later. I have something else to say first. I do not think, comrades, that I shall be with you for many months longer, and before I die, I feel it my duty to pass on to you such wisdom as I have acquired. I have had a long life, I have had much time for thought as I lay alone in my stall, and I think I may say that I understand the nature of life on this earth as well as any animal now living. It is about this that I wish to speak to you.

‘Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth.

‘But is this simply part of the order of nature? Is it because this land of ours is so poor that it cannot afford a decent life to those who dwell upon it? No, comrades, a thousand times no! The soil of England is fertile, its climate is good, it is capable of affording food in abundance to an enormously greater number of ani-

mals than now inhabit it. This single farm of ours would support a dozen horses, twenty cows, hundreds of sheep — and all of them living in a comfort and a dignity that are now almost beyond our imagining. Why then do we continue in this miserable condition? Because nearly the whole of the produce of our labour is stolen from us by human beings. There, comrades, is the answer to all our problems. It is summed up in a single word — Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever.

‘Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin. You cows that I see before me, how many thousands of gallons of milk have you given during this last year? And what has happened to that milk which should have been breeding up sturdy calves? Every drop of it has gone down the throats of our enemies. And you hens, how many eggs have you laid in this last year, and how many of those eggs ever hatched into chickens? The rest have all gone to market to bring in money for Jones and his men. And you, Clover, where are those four foals you bore, who should have been the support and pleasure of your old age? Each was sold at a year old — you will never see one of them again. In return for your four confinements and all your labour in the fields, what have you ever had except your bare rations and a stall?

‘And even the miserable lives we lead are not allowed to reach their natural span. For myself I do not grumble, for I am one of the lucky ones. I am twelve years old and have had over four

hundred children. Such is the natural life of a pig. But no animal escapes the cruel knife in the end. You young porkers who are sitting in front of me, every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year. To that horror we all must come — cows, pigs, hens, sheep, everyone. Even the horses and the dogs have no better fate. You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the foxhounds. As for the dogs, when they grow old and toothless, Jones ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond.

‘Is it not crystal clear, then, comrades, that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings? Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free. What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! I do not know when that Rebellion will come, it might be in a week or in a hundred years, but I know, as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done. Fix your eyes on that, comrades, throughout the short remainder of your lives! And above all, pass on this message of mine to those who come after you, so that future generations shall carry on the struggle until it is victorious.

‘And remember, comrades, your resolution must never falter. No argument must lead you astray. Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest, that the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others. It is all lies. Man serves the interests of no creature except himself. And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades.’

At this moment there was a tremendous uproar. While Major was speaking four large rats had crept out of their holes and were sitting on their hindquarters, listening to him. The dogs had suddenly caught sight of them, and it was only by a swift dash for their holes that the rats saved their lives. Major raised his trotter for silence.

‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘here is a point that must be settled. The wild creatures, such as rats and rabbits — are they our friends or our enemies? Let us put it to the vote. I propose this question to the meeting: Are rats comrades?’

The vote was taken at once, and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that rats were comrades. There were only four dissentients, the three dogs and the cat, who was afterwards discovered to have voted on both sides. Major continued:

‘I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal.

‘And now, comrades, I will tell you about my dream of last night. I cannot describe that dream to you. It was a dream of the earth as it will be when Man has vanished. But it reminded me of something that I had long forgotten. Many years ago, when I was a

little pig, my mother and the other sows used to sing an old song of which they knew only the tune and the first three words. I had known that tune in my infancy, but it had long since passed out of my mind. Last night, however, it came back to me in my dream. And what is more, the words of the song also came back — words, I am certain, which were sung by the animals of long ago and have been lost to memory for generations. I will sing you that song now, comrades. I am old and my voice is hoarse, but when I have taught you the tune, you can sing it better for yourselves. It is called *Beasts of England*.’

Old Major cleared his throat and began to sing. As he had said, his voice was hoarse, but he sang well enough, and it was a stirring tune, something between *Clementine* and *La Cucaracha*. The words ran:

*Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the golden future time.*

*Soon or late the day is coming,
Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown,
And the fruitful fields of England
Shall be trod by beasts alone.*

*Rings shall vanish from our noses,
And the harness from our back,
Bit and spur shall rust forever,
Cruel whips no more shall crack.*

*Riches more than mind can picture,
Wheat and barley, oats and hay,*

*Clover, beans, and mangel-wurzels
Shall be ours upon that day.*

*Bright will shine the fields of England,
Purer shall its waters be,
Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes
On the day that sets us free.*

*For that day we all must labour,
Though we die before it break;
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys,
All must toil for freedom's sake.*

*Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken well and spread my tidings
Of the golden future time.*

The singing of this song threw the animals into the wildest excitement. Almost before Major had reached the end, they had begun singing it for themselves. Even the stupidest of them had already picked up the tune and a few of the words, and as for the clever ones, such as the pigs and dogs, they had the entire song by heart within a few minutes. And then, after a few preliminary tries, the whole farm burst out into *Beasts of England* in tremendous unison. The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked it. They were so delighted with the song that they sang it right through five times in succession, and might have continued singing it all night if they had not been interrupted.

Unfortunately, the uproar awoke Mr. Jones, who sprang out of bed, making sure that there was a fox in the yard. He seized the gun which always stood in a corner of his bedroom, and let fly a

charge of number 6 shot into the darkness. The pellets buried themselves in the wall of the barn and the meeting broke up hurriedly. Everyone fled to his own sleeping-place. The birds jumped on to their perches, the animals settled down in the straw, and the whole farm was asleep in a moment.

Chapter 2

Three nights later old Major died peacefully in his sleep. His body was buried at the foot of the orchard.

This was early in March. During the next three months there was much secret activity. Major's speech had given to the more intelligent animals on the farm a completely new outlook on life. They did not know when the Rebellion predicted by Major would take place, they had no reason for thinking that it would be within their own lifetime, but they saw clearly that it was their duty to prepare for it. The work of teaching and organising the others fell naturally upon the pigs, who were generally recognised as being the cleverest of the animals. Pre-eminent among the pigs were two young boars named Snowball and Napoleon, whom Mr. Jones was breeding up for sale. Napoleon was a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way. Snowball was a more vivacious pig than Napoleon, quicker in speech and more inventive, but was not considered to have the same depth of character. All the other male pigs on the farm were porkers. The best known among them was a small fat pig named Squealer, with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice. He was a brilliant talker, and when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisk-

ing his tail which was somehow very persuasive. The others said of Squealer that he could turn black into white.

These three had elaborated old Major's teachings into a complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of Animalism. Several nights a week, after Mr. Jones was asleep, they held secret meetings in the barn and expounded the principles of Animalism to the others. At the beginning they met with much stupidity and apathy. Some of the animals talked of the duty of loyalty to Mr. Jones, whom they referred to as 'Master,' or made elementary remarks such as 'Mr. Jones feeds us. If he were gone, we should starve to death.' Others asked such questions as 'Why should we care what happens after we are dead?' or 'If this Rebellion is to happen anyway, what difference does it make whether we work for it or not?', and the pigs had great difficulty in making them see that this was contrary to the spirit of Animalism. The stupidest questions of all were asked by Mollie, the white mare. The very first question she asked Snowball was: 'Will there still be sugar after the Rebellion?'

'No,' said Snowball firmly. 'We have no means of making sugar on this farm. Besides, you do not need sugar. You will have all the oats and hay you want.'

'And shall I still be allowed to wear ribbons in my mane?' asked Mollie.

'Comrade,' said Snowball, 'those ribbons that you are so devoted to are the badge of slavery. Can you not understand that liberty is worth more than ribbons?'

Mollie agreed, but she did not sound very convinced.

The pigs had an even harder struggle to counteract the lies put about by Moses, the tame raven. Moses, who was Mr. Jones's especial pet, was a spy and a tale-bearer, but he was also a clever talker. He claimed to know of the existence of a mysterious country called Sugarcandy Mountain, to which all animals went when they died. It was situated somewhere up in the sky, a little distance beyond the clouds, Moses said. In Sugarcandy Mountain it was Sunday seven days a week, clover was in season all the year round, and lump sugar and linseed cake grew on the hedges. The animals hated Moses because he told tales and did no work, but some of them believed in Sugarcandy Mountain, and the pigs had to argue very hard to persuade them that there was no such place.

Their most faithful disciples were the two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover. These two had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves, but having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything that they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments. They were unfailing in their attendance at the secret meetings in the barn, and led the singing of *Beasts of England*, with which the meetings always ended.

Now, as it turned out, the Rebellion was achieved much earlier and more easily than anyone had expected. In past years Mr. Jones, although a hard master, had been a capable farmer, but of late he had fallen on evil days. He had become much disheartened after losing money in a lawsuit, and had taken to drinking more than was good for him. For whole days at a time he would lounge in his Windsor chair in the kitchen, reading the newspapers, drinking, and occasionally feeding Moses on crusts of bread soaked in beer. His men were idle and dishonest, the fields were full of weeds, the buildings wanted roofing, the hedges were neglected, and the animals were underfed.

June came and the hay was almost ready for cutting. On Midsummer's Eve, which was a Saturday, Mr. Jones went into Willingdon and got so drunk at the Red Lion that he did not come back till midday on Sunday. The men had milked the cows in the early morning and then had gone out rabbiting, without bothering to feed the animals. When Mr. Jones got back he immediately went to sleep on the drawing-room sofa with the *News of the World* over his face, so that when evening came, the animals were still unfed. At last they could stand it no longer. One of the cows broke in the door of the store-shed with her horn and all the animals began to help themselves from the bins. It was just then that Mr. Jones woke up. The next moment he and his four men were in the store-shed with whips in their hands, lashing out in all directions. This was more than the hungry animals could bear. With one accord, though nothing of the kind had been planned beforehand, they flung themselves upon their tormentors. Jones and his men suddenly found themselves being butted and kicked from all sides. The situation was quite out of their control. They had never seen animals behave like this before, and this sudden uprising of creatures whom they were used to thrashing and maltreating just as they chose, frightened them almost out of their wits. After only a moment or two they gave up trying to defend themselves and took to their heels. A minute later all five of them were in full flight down the cart-track that led to the main road, with the animals pursuing them in triumph.

Mrs. Jones looked out of the bedroom window, saw what was happening, hurriedly flung a few possessions into a carpet bag, and slipped out of the farm by another way. Moses sprang off his perch and flapped after her, croaking loudly. Meanwhile the animals had chased Jones and his men out on to the road and slammed the five-barred gate behind them. And so, almost before they knew what was happening, the Rebellion had been success-

fully carried through: Jones was expelled, and the Manor Farm was theirs.

For the first few minutes the animals could hardly believe in their good fortune. Their first act was to gallop in a body right round the boundaries of the farm, as though to make quite sure that no human being was hiding anywhere upon it; then they raced back to the farm buildings to wipe out the last traces of Jones's hated reign. The harness-room at the end of the stables was broken open; the bits, the nose-rings, the dog-chains, the cruel knives with which Mr. Jones had been used to castrate the pigs and lambs, were all flung down the well. The reins, the halters, the blinkers, the degrading nosebags, were thrown on to the rubbish fire which was burning in the yard. So were the whips. All the animals capered with joy when they saw the whips going up in flames. Snowball also threw on to the fire the ribbons with which the horses' manes and tails had usually been decorated on market days.

'Ribbons,' he said, 'should be considered as clothes, which are the mark of a human being. All animals should go naked.'

When Boxer heard this he fetched the small straw hat which he wore in summer to keep the flies out of his ears, and flung it on to the fire with the rest.

In a very little while the animals had destroyed everything that reminded them of Mr. Jones. Napoleon then led them back to the store-shed and served out a double ration of corn to everybody, with two biscuits for each dog. Then they sang *Beasts of England* from end to end seven times running, and after that they settled down for the night and slept as they had never slept before.

But they woke at dawn as usual, and suddenly remembering the glorious thing that had happened, they all raced out into the pasture together. A little way down the pasture there was a knoll that commanded a view of most of the farm. The animals rushed to the top of it and gazed round them in the clear morning light. Yes, it was theirs — everything that they could see was theirs! In the ecstasy of that thought they gambolled round and round, they hurled themselves into the air in great leaps of excitement. They rolled in the dew, they cropped mouthfuls of the sweet summer grass, they kicked up clods of the black earth and snuffed its rich scent. Then they made a tour of inspection of the whole farm and surveyed with speechless admiration the ploughland, the hayfield, the orchard, the pool, the spinney. It was as though they had never seen these things before, and even now they could hardly believe that it was all their own.

Then they filed back to the farm buildings and halted in silence outside the door of the farmhouse. That was theirs too, but they were frightened to go inside. After a moment, however, Snowball and Napoleon butted the door open with their shoulders and the animals entered in single file, walking with the utmost care for fear of disturbing anything. They tiptoed from room to room, afraid to speak above a whisper and gazing with a kind of awe at the unbelievable luxury, at the beds with their feather mattresses, the looking-glasses, the horsehair sofa, the Brussels carpet, the lithograph of Queen Victoria over the drawing-room mantelpiece. They were lust coming down the stairs when Mollie was discovered to be missing. Going back, the others found that she had remained behind in the best bedroom. She had taken a piece of blue ribbon from Mrs. Jones's dressing-table, and was holding it against her shoulder and admiring herself in the glass in a very foolish manner. The others reproached her sharply, and they went outside. Some hams hanging in the kitchen were taken out for bur-

ial, and the barrel of beer in the scullery was stove in with a kick from Boxer's hoof, — otherwise nothing in the house was touched. A unanimous resolution was passed on the spot that the farmhouse should be preserved as a museum. All were agreed that no animal must ever live there.

The animals had their breakfast, and then Snowball and Napoleon called them together again.

‘Comrades,’ said Snowball, ‘it is half-past six and we have a long day before us. Today we begin the hay harvest. But there is another matter that must be attended to first.’

The pigs now revealed that during the past three months they had taught themselves to read and write from an old spelling book which had belonged to Mr. Jones's children and which had been thrown on the rubbish heap. Napoleon sent for pots of black and white paint and led the way down to the five-barred gate that gave on to the main road. Then Snowball (for it was Snowball who was best at writing) took a brush between the two knuckles of his trotter, painted out MANOR FARM from the top bar of the gate and in its place painted ANIMAL FARM. This was to be the name of the farm from now onwards. After this they went back to the farm buildings, where Snowball and Napoleon sent for a ladder which they caused to be set against the end wall of the big barn. They explained that by their studies of the past three months the pigs had succeeded in reducing the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments. These Seven Commandments would now be inscribed on the wall; they would form an unalterable law by which all the animals on Animal Farm must live for ever after. With some difficulty (for it is not easy for a pig to balance himself on a ladder) Snowball climbed up and set to work, with Squealer a few rungs below him holding the paint-pot. The Commandments

were written on the tarred wall in great white letters that could be read thirty yards away. They ran thus:

THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

It was very neatly written, and except that 'friend' was written 'freind' and one of the 'S's' was the wrong way round, the spelling was correct all the way through. Snowball read it aloud for the benefit of the others. All the animals nodded in complete agreement, and the cleverer ones at once began to learn the Commandments by heart.

'Now, comrades,' cried Snowball, throwing down the paintbrush, 'to the hayfield! Let us make it a point of honour to get in the harvest more quickly than Jones and his men could do.'

But at this moment the three cows, who had seemed uneasy for some time past, set up a loud lowing. They had not been milked for twenty-four hours, and their udders were almost bursting. After a little thought, the pigs sent for buckets and milked the cows fairly successfully, their trotters being well adapted to this

task. Soon there were five buckets of frothing creamy milk at which many of the animals looked with considerable interest.

'What is going to happen to all that milk?' said someone.

'Jones used sometimes to mix some of it in our mash,' said one of the hens.

'Never mind the milk, comrades!' cried Napoleon, placing himself in front of the buckets. 'That will be attended to. The harvest is more important. Comrade Snowball will lead the way. I shall follow in a few minutes. Forward, comrades! The hay is waiting.'

So the animals trooped down to the hayfield to begin the harvest, and when they came back in the evening it was noticed that the milk had disappeared.

NEXT STEP: AFTER COMPLETING A SPEED DRILL

Now that you've finished your first speed drill, it's time to re-test your regular reading speed.

On the next page, read the passage at a speed that feels comfortable to you. Make sure that you're using your hand to guide your eyes, but this time make sure you that you read at a speed that allows you to get comprehension. Don't go too fast or too slow. Balance out your reading speed, as you normally would, to understand what you are reading.

When you are ready, set your timer for one minute and begin reading on the next page. When you are finished, calculate your reading speed by multiplying the number of lines read by 12 (the average number of words per line in this book).

Begin reading on the next page for one minute when you are ready.

Focus: A Simplicity Manifesto in the Age of Distraction **by Leo Babauta**

We live in curious times. It's called the Age of Information, but in another light it can be called the Age of Distraction.

While humanity has never been free of distraction — from swatting those bothersome gnats around the fireplace to dealing with piles of paper mail and ringing telephones — never have the distractions been so voluminous, so overwhelming, so intense, so persistent as they are now. Ringing phones are one thing, but email notifications, Twitter and Facebook messages, an array of browser tabs open, and mobile devices that are always on and always beeping are quite another. More and more, we are connected, we are up to our necks in the stream of information, we are in the crossfire of the battle for our attention, and we are engaged in a harrying blur of multitasking activity.

When we're working, we have distractions coming from every direction. In front of us is the computer, with email notifications and other notifications of all kinds. Then there's the addicting lure of the browser, which contains not only an endless amount of reading material that can be a black hole into which we never escape, but unlimited opportunities for shopping, for chatting with other people, for gossip and news and lurid photos and so much more. All the while, several new emails have come in, waiting for a quick response. Several programs are open at once, each of them with tasks to complete. Several people would like to chat, dividing our attention even further.

And that's just in front of us. From the sides come a ringing desk phone, a ringing mobile device, music from several different coworkers, a colleague coming to our desk asking a question, in-

coming papers needing attention, other papers scattered across our desks, someone calling a meeting, another offering up food.

With so much competing for our attention, and so little time to focus on real work, it's a wonder we get anything done at all.

And then we leave work, but the attack on our attention doesn't end. We bring the mobile device, with incoming text and email messages, all needing a reply, with incoming calls that can't be ignored. We have reading material, either in paper form or on the mobile device, to keep our attention occupied. We are bombarded from all sides by advertising, asking for not only attention but our desires. We get home, and there's the television, constantly blaring, with 500 channels all asking for yet more attention, with 500,000 ads asking for yet more desires. There's our home computer, asking us to do more work, sending us more messages, more distractions, social networks and shopping and reading. There are kids or spouses or roommates or friends, there's the home phone, and still the mobile device is going off.

This is unprecedented, and it's alarming.

We've come into this Age without being aware that it was happening, or realizing its consequences. Sure, we knew that the Internet was proliferating, and we were excited about that. We knew that mobile devices were becoming more and more ubiquitous, and maybe some people harrumphed and others welcomed the connectivity. But while the opportunities offered by this online world are a good thing, the constant distractions, the increasingly urgent pull on our attention, the stress of multitasking at an ever-finer granular level, the erosion of our free time and our ability to live with a modicum of peace ... perhaps we didn't realize how much this would change our lives.

Maybe some did. And maybe many still don't realize it.

I think, with so many things asking for our attention, it's time we paid attention to this.

It's an Addiction

There's instant positive feedback to such constant activities as checking email, surfing the web, checking social networks such as blogs, forums, Twitter and Facebook. That's why it's so easy to become addicted to being connected and distracted.

Other addictive activities, such as doing drugs or eating junk food, have the same kind of instant positive feedback — you do the activity, and right away, you're rewarded with something pleasurable but don't feel the negative consequences until much later. Checking email, or any similar online activity, has that addictive quality of instant positive feedback and delayed negative feedback.

You check your email and hey! A new email from a friend! You get a positive feeling, perhaps a validation of your self-worth, when you receive a new email. It feels good to get a message from someone. And thus the instant positive feedback rewards you checking email, more and more frequently, until the addiction is solidly ingrained.

Now, you might later get tired of answering all your email, because it's overwhelming and difficult to keep up with. But usually by then, you're addicted and can't stop checking. And usually the checking of the email has positive reward (a good feeling) but it's the activity of answering all the emails that isn't as fun.

We'll explore how we can stop this addiction later, in the chapter "the beauty of disconnection".

It's a New Lifestyle

Being connected, getting information all the time, having constant distractions ... it has all become a part of our lives.

Computers, at one time, were a small part of our lives — perhaps we used them at work, but in the car and on the train, and usually at home and when we're out doing other things, we were disconnected. Even at work, our computers had limited capabilities — we could only do certain things with desktop applications, and while solitaire is definitely addicting, it doesn't take up your entire life.

Not so anymore.

Computers are taking over our lives. And while I'm as pro-technology as the next guy (more so in many cases), I also think we need to consider the consequences of this new lifestyle.

Because we've created a new lifestyle very rapidly, and I'm not sure we're prepared for it. We don't have new strategies for dealing with being connected most of the time, we don't have new cultural norms, nor have we figured out if this is the best way to live life. We've been plunged into it, before we could develop a system for handling it.

HOW SPEED DRILLS WORK

Did you calculate your reading speed once again after doing the speed drills? Did you read faster this time around? Most people at this point make some sort of improvement in their reading speed because they have started to train themselves to see words at a more rapid pace.

You can compare the experience of speed drills to driving a car on the highway. If you get used to going at a fast speed on the highway, how does it feel when you get off the highway? Doesn't it feel kind of slow? The reason it feels slow is because when you get used to going at a fast speed, a slower speed feels much slower.

The concept behind speed drills is very similar. During the drill, you get used to going at a speed that is much faster than your normal reading speed. You get used to this speed by practicing the drill repetitively. After a certain amount of time practicing, you go back to reading at your comfort level. At this point, it is easier to read at a speed that is faster than your regular reading rate because you conditioned yourself to see words at a much faster rate.

The fundamental idea behind speed reading is proper use of the eyes. Most readers don't realize that they're permitting their eyes to slow them down. If you increase your eyes' speed in picking up words and communicating them to the brain—and this can be done with practice—your reading speed will increase.

But reading isn't simply a question of eye performance; it's mind performance too. The way that your brain reacts to the material sent to it by your eyes determines your capacity both to comprehend and to recall. One of our objectives, then, must be to train the mind to be an active recipient and processor of information. This is easily achieved with regular reading practice. The more you

read, the more agile your mind becomes. You increase your perceptivity the faster you read, the more you read, and the more you expose yourself to different reading materials. It's incredible how stimulated and powerful the reading brain becomes, given a fresh challenge and a few weeks of regular practice. When you consider the interdependent roles eye and mind play in the reading process, you see that speed reading simply means trained eyes and trained mind working together at peak performance.

While this basic drill is designed primarily to increase eye movement and allow us to move through material much more quickly, it also addresses the three bad habits of fixation, regression, and subvocalization.

First of all, moving through the material at the pace that the drill demands makes it impossible to fixate on each word as you normally would. You might notice that you're fixating on some of the words—if so, rest assured that this is normal, and expected. Our goal is to reduce the number of fixations that you make per line—not eliminate fixations altogether. We're striving to include more words in each fixation of the eye, so that you start to grab groups of words at a glance, rather taking a zoomed-in, bulls-eye approach, seeing only one word per fixation. The bottom line is that you're moving through the material too quickly to fixate, and so you don't. Now—it's easy to forgo fixations when you're not reading for comprehension, but simply to see the words quickly in a speed drill. Even though the conditions under which you're reducing your fixations are somewhat artificial, in that you're not actually reading, it's still helpful in reducing overall fixations because you are training your eyes to see words in a fast, fluid, sweeping fashion, versus the old habit of locking in on each individual word.

This basic drill also addresses your regression habit. Chances are you weren't regressing as you read the material. This drill eliminates regressions for a couple of reasons: the first is that you're pushed to go so fast, making regressions is an impossible use of time. The second is that since you're not reading for actual comprehension, there is no functional reason to go back and re-read. Your comprehension is supposed to be poor during this exercise, so there is no utility in regressing to revisit material.

Again, these are practice conditions that are allowing for you to experience reading without regression—but they're still effective in reducing this bad habit. You're training your eye to have a physical instinct of forward movement. To reduce regressions, our intention is to cultivate the instinct to move forward, and see whether clarification comes later. It's fine if we make calculated regressions when we're confused and need to clarify material—but we want to grow the impulse to move forward.

Lastly, and most significantly, this drill makes inroads in reducing subvocalization. You're reading so fast that it's impossible to hear each word in your head, so you're giving yourself the experience of seeing words without hearing them. Now, if you noticed that you're still hearing some words, understand that this is expected.

Subvocalization is an entrenched habit, ingrained from your earliest reading experiences, and it takes time and practice to disengage yourself from it. This is how you rid yourself of the habit, though: through repeated experiences in which you read words fast, and don't hear them. The more you do the drill, the more words will not be accompanied by your voice, and the more comfortable you'll become with the experience of seeing words without hearing them in your head.

Again, don't be discouraged if you notice that you're still hearing some words in your head—this is normal. You've only just begun unraveling this old reading habit, and making significant improvements on this front takes time. And keep in mind that our goal isn't necessarily to eliminate regressions altogether—our objective is a significant reduction.

Reading Faster on the Computer Screen

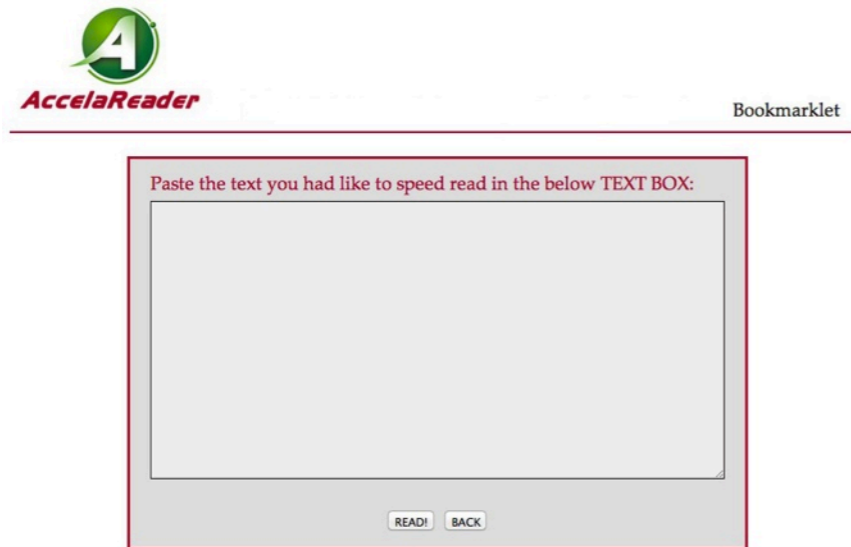
Earlier we discussed the importance of using your hand as a pacer. But if you do a lot of reading on the computer screen, using your hand as a pacer is not very practical.

If you want to read faster on the computer screen, you should utilize a free program developed by Iris Reading called AccelaReader. This program is available for free at www.AccelaReader.com.



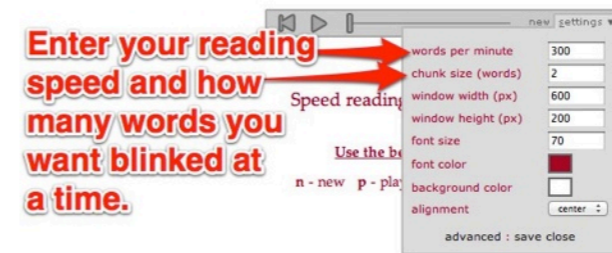
This program utilizes a technology called *Rapid Serial Visual Representation* (RSVP). RSVP works by flashing words on the screen at a speed that you set.

To get started using AccelaReader, you simply copy and paste the material you want to read into the textbox on AccelaReader.com and then click the “Read” button.



After clicking “Read” you then select the speed at which you want to read. You can also set how many words you want to see blinked at a time. We recommend you start with two or three words blinked at a time and then work your way up from there.

Three nights



After selecting your speed and the amount of words you want to see at a time, you then click the play button and the words will blink at the speed that you set.

Three nights later

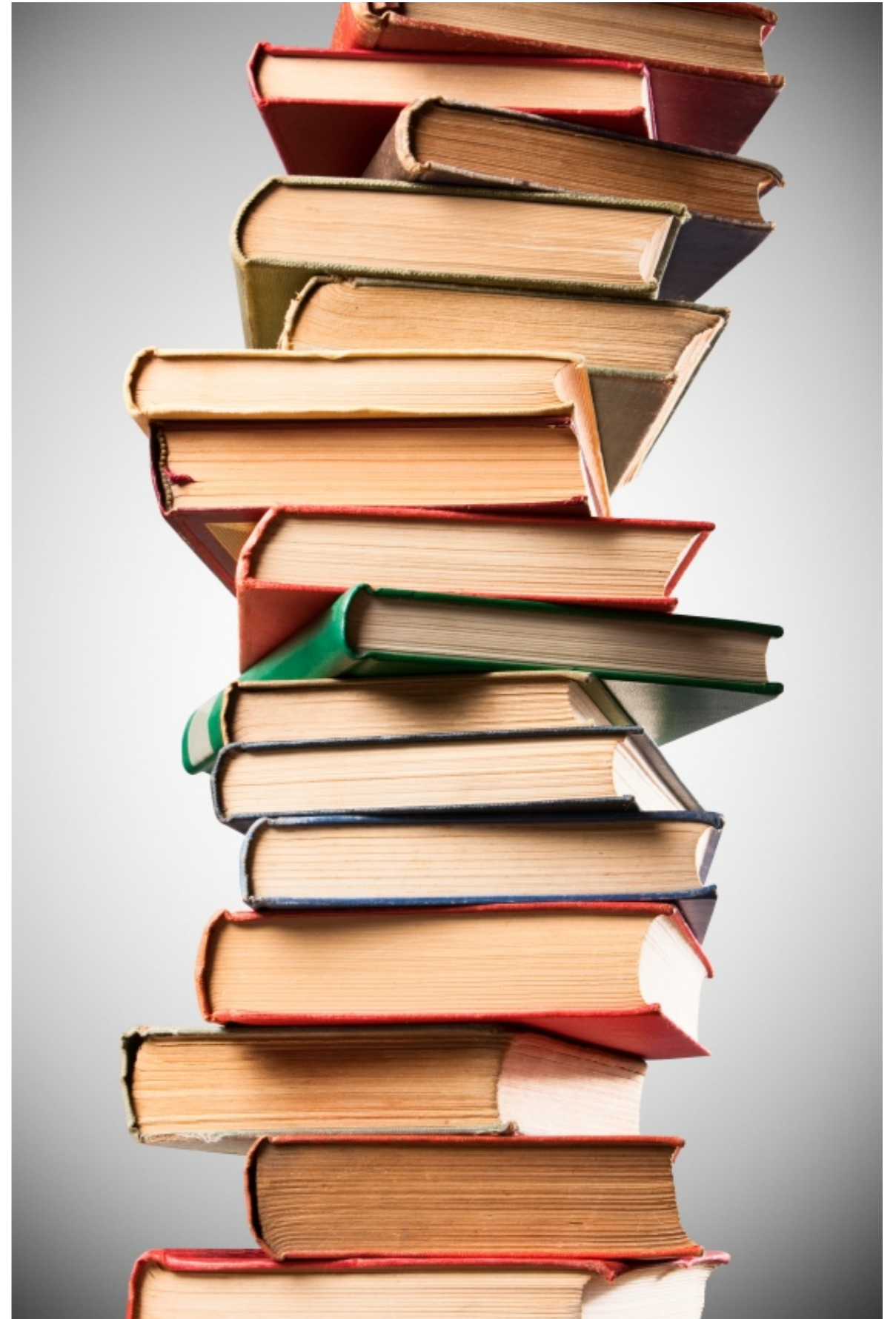


The AccelaReader application allows you to read faster on the computer screen without using your hand as a pacer. You simply pace yourself by entering a reading speed that you feel is ideal for the material you are about to read.

You can also do a speed drill with this application by setting AccelaReader at a speed that is much faster than you would normally read. As you practiced before, you read for a certain period of time (i.e. 10 minutes) and then try to re-read the material in less time, at a faster speed. You do this repetitively for about 15-20 minutes of practice. This is a great way to start improving your reading speed on the computer screen if that's where most of your reading resides.

Conclusion: What Now?

You now know the basics. Are you ready to continue? You'll fully capable of making of making more dramatic improvements in your reading ability. This "Speed Reading 101" book covered the basics, but there's so much more to learn. In this book, we've covered some basic speed reading drills, but there are also strategies to improve your comprehension and retention.



NEXT STEPS

If you'd like to learn more, Iris Reading provides a comprehensive speed-reading course that can help you reach an optimal reading rate. We also provide memory improvement courses to help you remember the things you commonly forget.

To get more information, visit www.irisreading.com.

Thanks for reading,

Paul Nowak

Founder & Program Director

Iris Reading

P.S. If you'd like to connect with me on the web, feel free to do so through the following links:

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/paulnowak

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