



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Speed Read

CARL THUM
DIRECTOR, ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER

Speed reading isn't just about speed—"it's about reading improvement," says Thum, adjunct assistant professor of writing. Anyone can train their eyes to move faster across a page of informational prose, he says, but the ability to accurately recall what is read is the real challenge. Proper speed-reading technique combines increased speed with enhanced comprehension. Here are Thum's tips for becoming a more effective reader. —*Gayne Kalustian '17*

ESTABLISH A GOAL

"Ask yourself what you are reading, why you are reading it and what you want to get out of it. If you're not doing that, two things are going to happen: You're going to read more slowly than you need to and you're not going to get much out of it. It's like a 'pre-pre-reading' and it takes about two seconds. Once you have this notion of what you want to do and why you are doing it, then you can start acting on it in a way that makes sense."

SURVEY THE WHOLE

"Never start with the first word of the first sentence on the first page. It's like taking a mental trip without a cognitive map. Create an 'advanced organizer.' You're going to look at the headings, the titles, how long the piece is, if there is a summary at the end, subheadings, the pictures, how many parts it is divided into. Start taking notes to reduce and distill the information. Forget the underlining and turn all the headings and subheadings into a question to get at the most important information."

MAKE FEWER STOPS

"All a faster reader does better than a slower reader is make fewer fixations, or stops with their eyes, per line. Since a significant number of words are meaningless, many readers learn to fixate on the content words—nouns, verbs, adjectives—that have meaning. One simple technique to increase reading rate (and improve comprehension) is to draw two equally spaced vertical lines down the page and, using a pen or pencil, make three eye fixations per line, rather than 10 or 15 fixations."

PRACTICE

"If you're going to need to be able to retrieve the information, whether because you're going to be tested on it or you want to be able to pull it out at a cocktail party, you need to put the information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. Do not go back and reread it. Go back and actively review and practice the information. Go back and ask yourself your questions. You don't do it once, you do it two or three times. That pushes the point of how serious you want to be about this."