

SUMMARY

10 DAYS TO FASTER READING

THE PRINCETON LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
AND ABBY MARKS BEALE



Summary of “10 Days to Faster Reading” by The Princeton Language Institute and Abby Marks Beale

Written by Alyssa Burnette

The competing pressures of our daily lives often leave us little time to read, but by applying this life hack, you can improve your reading speed in under 10 days!

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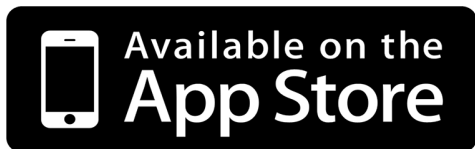


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Introduction

If you had your very own genie with the power to grant any three wishes of your choice, what would you request? Would you want unlimited wishes? The ability to fly? To find true love? What about the ability to finally get through all the books you want to read? For many people who possess a strong love of books and an infinite pile of texts to be read, that might seem like an impossible dream. But in fact, that's actually a very realistic goal! Because this book can't give you the ability to fly or match you with your dream partner, but it can provide you with the tools you'll need to develop efficient reading habits.

So, through this summary, you're going to learn how shedding a few negative habits and replacing them with good ones can not only help you become a faster reader, but improve your ability to retain information! And these strategies aren't just limited to one form of print media; you can practice them with your local newspaper, your textbook, or that bestseller you've been wanting to read! So, over the course of the next few chapters, we'll take a look at:

- Our attitudes toward reading
- What happens to your brain when it isn't reaching its full potential and
- How to get 40% of a book's key information before you even read it!

We Put Too Much Pressure on Ourselves When we Read

So much to read, so little time! It's such a common problem that there are endless memes, gifs, and slogans dedicated to it, and we relate to them so much that we like them and tweet them and decorate our homes with slogans that attest to our struggles with reading. As any true book lover knows, the problem lies in our constant ability to find a new book so interesting that we snatch it up and abandon our current pile of books to be read, convinced that we'll quickly finish this one and move on to the others. Except it never quite works out that way. Life gets in the way or we're interrupted by something else and so our to-be-read pile grows slowly taller and taller until it takes over our homes!

But what if I told you that the problem isn't a lack of time? And that you can actually go through every book on your list with ease? All you have to do is address a few common misconceptions about reading and eradicate them from your mind. The first misconception to tackle is the pressure we put on ourselves when it comes to reading. Because we're often tested on reading comprehension in school, we develop the perception-- and possibly even some anxiety-- that we have to fully remember and understand everything we read. But nothing could be further from the truth! Although it might be helpful to set aside time for deeply engaging with a novel if we want to really dig into the plot, we don't have to read everything like we're preparing for a quiz.

So, especially when it comes to the documents that pass across your desk or the newspaper you'd like to read, learning to skim effectively and prioritize the key highlights of a text are crucial. However, that doesn't mean you should read as though you expect information to go in one ear and out the other; instead, you simply need to learn a little bit about memory and how it impacts your relationship with reading. Even if you memorize something, that material lives in your short-term memory, which means it's forgotten after a few days. So, if you want to retain what you're reading and be able to

recall it in the future, you'll need to formulate a user-friendly info-retrieval system.

In practice, this means that while you're skimming for those key highlights, you should take a few notes as you go. Jot down the important bits you want to remember in a notebook or make notes in the margins of your text. You can then physically file this information away and pull it out again when you need a refresher!

And lastly, let's confront one more misconception we have about reading: the idea that we shouldn't be reading at work. Many people have the impression that reading while they're on the clock is perceived as a waste of time or could hinder their performance. But in fact, that's exactly what you should be doing! No matter what your career is, perusing relevant materials on the job can help you stay up to date on best practices in your field, help you come up with new ideas, and find ways to dominate your target market! And when you think of it like that, reading kind of sounds like it's part of your job description!

Out With the Old, In With the New

As is the case with any form of self-improvement, if we want to get better, we have to kick out our bad habits and replace them with something good. And becoming a more effective reader is exactly that simple. So, now that we've addressed a few of our most common misconceptions about reading, let's take a look at the habits that hinder our progress. One of the most common ones is passive daydreaming. We've all been there, after all; we should be reading, but we can't focus, so instead our mind goes down a thousand rabbit trails, none of which are related to what we should be doing. It's no surprise that this hinders both our reading comprehension and our ability to engage with the text, so it's important to redirect this habit into a positive strategy called "active mind wandering."

Instead of trying to force our brain to stick to one subject, this type of thinking allows our minds to wander as they wish, but keeps them slightly more on track by using that wandering to relate the information we're reading to our own experience. So, if you read something that makes you go, "Oh, that reminds me of...!" it's okay to let your mind go down that path and reflect on an experience you've had that's similar to what you're encountering in the book. This practice not only helps you to read more efficiently, it also ensures that you're connecting with what you've read through personal application.

Another bad reading habit is regression or re-reading what we just read. This can occur as a side-effect of passive daydreaming or because we simply have trouble focusing, but it's definitely a major handicap to efficient reading. So, if you want to avoid regression, try reading a paragraph, then covering it with a business card to give yourself time to ask if you remember and understand what you just read. This can help you to focus on bite-sized portions of a text at a time and improve your ability to get through a book, not to mention it will cut down on wasted time! However, if you find yourself genuinely struggling to understand what you read or questioning an author's meaning or word choice, it's always okay to give yourself extra

time to wrap your head around a concept before moving on to the next page.

Our third bad habit is subvocalizing, which occurs when people mouth words to themselves while they're reading or read the text out loud in their heads. Although this can be a helpful tool for people who struggle with dyslexia or other language processing disorders, for the average neurotypical reader, this just slows you down. That's because the brain can process up to 400 words per minute at "reading speed," but only 150 words at "talking speed." So, when we mutter the words to ourselves like we're talking, we slow down our reading speed by twice as many words per minute!

A lot of people subvocalize without realizing it, so conscious effort is key to avoiding this common pitfall. To effectively read for speed, try focusing on the keywords that jump out at you and skipping over the rest. And if doing something with your mouth helps you feel better, you can hum or chew gum while you're reading, as both of these practices will keep you engaged and help you speed up your reading in accordance with the noises' rhythms.

Take Some Speed-Reading Reading Shortcuts

So, now that we've looked at some bad habits and misconceptions, let's examine some strategies we can use to replace them. The first step is to identify a clear purpose and keep that in mind. Be intentional about choosing what you want to read and ask yourself, "Why am I reading this?" Contemplate what you want to get out of the text, whether that's enjoyment, personal development, or information that might be beneficial to your career and then go after it!

Next, ask yourself, "Why do I need this information?" This can be especially helpful because it enables you to weed out toxic or useless material. If, for example, you're scrolling through someone's Facebook feed to read the hurtful things they might have posted about you, is that information really going to be beneficial to your life? Similarly, if you're reading notes from a meeting that isn't relevant to your work, why are you reading it? If you ask yourself these questions and can't find a good answer, then that's a sign that you need to stop reading it!

Another helpful step is to preview nonfiction material before you read it. Whether that's a book on personal development or a report from work, getting bogged down in boring details is a common trap with nonfiction and it can be easily avoided. So, start by looking at the introductory paragraphs and scanning the table of contents to get an idea of where the text is going. If you're reading a nonfiction book, it's pretty much guaranteed that the chapter titles and subheadings will be bolded or emphasized in some way, so you can get a quick idea of what each section is about and determine whether or not it's relevant to you.

These strategies probably sound pretty simple, but would you believe that these very simple practices can actually help you ascertain 40% of a text's key information? Without even reading the entire text, pre-viewing can help you absorb enough background information to not only get through the book but also glean and benefit from its key insights!

Speed Read With Keywords

Another important step in learning how to become an efficient reader is discovering the tricks that will actually help you read faster. This is especially beneficial because, for most of us, our experience with being taught how to read ended in elementary school. Sadly, once we know how to read well enough to keep up with the class, our teachers often lack the time and resources to update us on best practices that will enhance our reading futures. This means that by the time we reach adulthood, our reading habits are pretty out of date, so now it's time to take a quick refresher course.

Because in addition to the good habits we've discussed earlier, there are also a few strategies you can employ to literally become a faster reader. Let's take a look at some different examples and you can discover the life hacks that work best for you. The first tip involves scanning for keywords, as we mentioned in an earlier chapter. Using this strategy, you can learn to focus only on the important words and skip the filler words that don't actively contribute to your understanding of the content. So, scan each sentence for the keywords, which are usually longer than three letters and carry a certain level of meaning. These impact words will allow you to get the key meaning of a sentence without having to read the whole thing or get lost in filler words.

Another effective strategy is to organize your reading into thought groups. Pretend that the phrases you're reading are separated by slashes, as if they look like this: by looking for/thought groups,/you force your eyes/to move forward faster/while maintaining/good comprehension. This tip requires you to employ your peripheral vision in order to comprehend the whole phrase at each stop and this can seriously improve both your vision and your reading comprehension! Mastering this requires training your peripheral vision, however, and you can do so through a few quick exercises.

For example, if you're driving or walking through town, try glancing quickly at a phrase on a sign and seeing if you can accurately repeat it to yourself. If you're stuck in traffic, check out the license plates and bumper stickers of the cars in front of you and try repeating it aloud from memory. Your eyes might feel strained as you practice training your peripheral vision, but that's because you're literally giving your eyes a workout! And the more you exercise your peripheral vision, the better you'll be able to focus and quickly recall phrases.

Reading Between the Lines

We've thrown a lot of suggestions at you already, but these aren't the only strategies for becoming a more efficient reader! So, let's take a look at a few extra helpful tricks, one of which involves literally "reading between the lines!" Perfect for people who struggle with subvocalizing, this tip helps you to overcome that habit by focusing on the white space just above each line. Because you'll still be able to see the top half of the letters, you can easily understand them at a glance without losing your place in the sentence or becoming fixated on each individual word. So, while reading between the lines might not always be a great strategy in social situations, this is one case where you should definitely try it!

Another great tip is indenting. This strategy strengthens your peripheral vision by asking you to begin reading by aiming your eyes half an inch inside the left margin and stop reading half an inch before the right margin. Doing this means that you'll still be able to see the beginning and end of each sentence through your peripheral vision, but you'll miss out on potential distractions that occur when your eyes stop and start multiple times throughout one sentence. Because some people struggle with their eyes stopping seven or eight times per line, reducing the amount of stops even by one can improve your overall reading speed by more than 10%!

Using Your Hand or a Pen as Tools

When you were a kid, did you ever use your finger or a pen as a tool to help you keep your place in a book? By moving one of these under a line of text as you read, you were able to keep your place and focus on each individual sentence as you read. And although we often shed this skill in adulthood, it may be time to bring it back! That's because our eyes naturally follow movement. Just like your eyes instantly notice when there's a fly on your bedroom ceiling, the motions of your fingers underneath a line of text will attract your eyes and cause them to move more quickly while reading.

By practicing this method in conjunction with the tips we addressed earlier, you can prevent both passive daydreaming and subvocalizing! And if you want to cut out regression as well, you can apply the business card trick we discussed at the same time! Simply begin by moving your index finger slowly under the line of text you're reading and, when you're finished with that paragraph, place a business card over it to prevent re-reading. If you make a fist with your left hand and stick your thumb out to the side, you can continue holding the business card in place while using your right hand's index finger as a reading aid.

Although we recognize that these strategies might make you feel a little awkward or embarrassed, there are two silver linings. For one thing, they can help you achieve fast and genuine results that will make you a more efficient reader. And secondly, they're just temporary teaching tools; you won't need them forever! Just like training wheels, which might be embarrassing when you first learn to ride a bike, you'll soon outgrow them and be ready to relinquish the beginner's learning aids which helped you master a skill.

Final Summary

Although we've been reading our whole lives, most of us stopped actively cultivating our reading practices in elementary school. As a result, we may struggle to read as quickly or efficiently as we would like and we may wrongly assume this to be the result of our busy schedules or hectic social lives. But in fact, no matter how much time we have, we can all learn to become more efficient readers in under 10 days by eradicating some common misperceptions about reading, replacing bad habits with good ones, and employing some useful reading hacks. By simply re-training our brains, exercising our peripheral vision, and using teaching aids like our fingers, a pen, or a business card, each of us can become a master speed reader.



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