

Want to Improve your Reading Speed and Comprehension? Try Stopwatch Reading!

If you can spare just 10 minutes a day over a 6 week period to read an easy paperback, you can improve your reading efficiency without a great deal of effort. Here's how:

Choose a fiction or non-fiction paperback: one you've always wanted to read but just never had time to.

- It's best to choose a book that you consider "easy reading" and one where you will be satisfied knowing only the main ideas and not all the details.
- You will also need 2-3 paper clips and a stop-watch or timer.

Day 1: Set your timer for 10 minutes.

- Read as much as you can of your paperback during that time.
- When the timer goes, stop reading and insert a paperclip at the top of the last page you read.
- Then close the book and summarize out loud everything you remember reading.
- Put your book away until the next day.

Day 2: Count the number of pages you read on Day 1 (from the beginning of the book to the paper clip you inserted). Then, starting at the paperclip:

- Count off the same number of pages plus one more and insert a second paper clip.
- Set your timer for 10 minutes and read fast enough to get through all the pages up to the second paper clip in the 10 minutes.
- Now close your book and summarize out loud all that you remember.

Day 3 and after: Repeat the procedure for Day 2.

- Increase by 1 the number of pages to read by counting them off and marking your target with a paper clip;
- Read fast enough to cover all the pages up to the paper clip;
- Close the book and summarize all you remember.
- After a couple of weeks, increase the number of pages only every 2-3 days rather than every day.
-
- What will happen is that as you increase the number of pages you read in 10 minutes, you will have to read faster and comprehend less.

How and Why does Stopwatch Reading Work?

Experts tell us that we have to sacrifice comprehension at first to build speed.

- So, for this exercise, as long as you can summarize even a few ideas at the end of 10 minutes, you are on track. Your comprehension will increase later on with practice.

Doing this exercise regularly will force you to devise new strategies for covering pages of text more quickly.

- You will learn how to find the most important ideas on the page in the fastest time. For example, try skimming to answer a question or to check out a prediction. Try focusing on headings, first sentences of paragraphs, bold words, dialogue, etc. Or try reading words diagonally, up and down the page, in circles, etc.

This type of reading will also improve your risk taking, a characteristic of all efficient readers.

- With practice, you will learn to make educated guesses at the ideas or information on the page by sampling some of the text and then elaborating with knowledge from your head. Efficient reading involves linking what's on the page and what's in your head.

Of course, you usually won't read school material such as a text book with the same speed or abandon. But the strategies that you learn by doing this type of exercise over time will pay off with greater comprehension in less time even for slower academic reading. You will be more efficient at finding the most important ideas in whatever you read.

Student Learning Services, Concordia University

RESOURCE:

<http://learning.concordia.ca/Help/handouts/Reading.HO/StopWatchReading.shtml>