OET – Reading Guide

PASCAL'S TRIANGLE

Pascal's Triangle is a triangle of numbers that follow the rule of adding the two numbers above to get the number below. This pattern can continue endlessly. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) used the triangle to study probability theory, as described in his book *Traité du triangle arithmétique* (1653). It also had been studied about 500 years earlier by Chinese mathematician Yang Hui (1238-1298). The Triangle's patterns translate to mathematical properties of the binomial coefficients.

FIBONACCI NUMBERS

The sum of the numbers on the diagonal shown on Pascal's Triangle match the Fibonacci Numbers. The sequence progresses in this order: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89 and so on. Each number in the sequence is the sum of the previous two numbers. For example: 2+3=5; 3+5=8; 5+8=13; 8+13=21 and so on. Leonardo Fibonacci popularized these numbers in his book Liber Abaci (1202). A Fibonacci spiral is a series of one-quarter circles drawn inside a pattern of squares with Fibonacci numbers for dimensions.

GOLDEN RATIO

As you progress through the Fibonacci Numbers, the ratios of consecutive Fibonacci numbers approach the Golden Ratio of 1.61803398...., but never equals it. For example: 55/34=1.618; 89/55=1.618 and 144/89=1.618. Artists and architects, including Dali, have proportioned their works to approximate the Golden Ratio, which can also be seen in many patterns in nature, including the spiral arrangement of leaves.

Contents:

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https://skypeteacher.uk

Introduction

Many candidates ask me what skills are required in the OET reading test and how we can prepare for the exam. What I always recommend is to approach any test systematically by first looking at the marking criteria. For example, in OET test the reading module has three parts:

Update

3 Parts – 60 mins

Part A – 4 texts

Gap fill, matching, short answer

15

Part B – 6 short texts

- 3-option multiple choice questions

Part C – 2 passages

- 4-option multiple choice questions

45

Part A

Pate A that is 15 minutes consists of four texts and the focus in this part is on fast reading, skimming, and scanning; I add surveying to the skills.

In this section you are supposed to answer 20 questions in 15 minutes, and therefore, you need to be able to extract detailed information as quickly as possible.

This section has a certain structure starting with four texts and then six or seven matching questions, where you need to decide the information given in the sentence matches with which text.

3 Parts – 60 mins

Part A – 4 texts
Gap fill, matching, short answer

Part B – 6 short texts
- 3-option multiple choice questions

Part C – 2 passages
- 4-option multiple choice questions

The next few questions are written questions where you need to answer them with a few words or numbers, and later with completing a sentence with the words or numbers.

N.B. Please note that in this section the words that are considered acceptable answers must be exactly cited in the text and you must not change the word form; for example, if the answer is a noun you must find a noun that is mentioned in a text, or if you're looking for a verb, the exact word must be mentioned in the text whether or not in the same place as the answer. Spelling mistakes or not acceptable because you can see the exact word in the text, and you need to pay attention to capital words and structural appropriateness (in sentence completion).

Part B

Part B of the reading test consists of six short texts and are multiple choice questions with three options. In this part of the exam, the target skills are understanding the gist, or identifying the purpose, detailed information, function, and similar concepts. In this part of the exam you are not supposed to scan for keywords or synonyms, as these are usually distractors.

The type of distractors in this part of the test are based on a *similar word or synonym, similar concepts but more general or more specific than the correct answer, misplacement of cause-and-effect, differentiation between fact and opinion, and similar concepts.* The most important factor in answering these questions correctly is to understand the stem of the question. Make sure you read the stem carefully and paraphrase or even translate it into your own language to understand what it exactly questioned. This part requires comprehension of a bigger chunk of the text, and deeper meaning.

> *N.B. Most of the similar words that are mentioned in the text, or even their synonyms, are usually distractors; you cannot use the same scanning or skimming techniques as you did in part A of the test.*

Part C

Part C of the test is two long texts each with 8 questions; in this part of the test, you need to understand comprehensive texts; that means a bigger chunk of the text. You need to be able to understand *infer* meaning and identify *points of view*, *opinions, attitude,* and similar concepts.

There are some questions that target lexical reference; ie, a pronoun that refers to a particular word to be identified by the candidate; another type of question, which is called contextual meaning, in which a word or phrase is used in a different meaning or in a particular way which is different from its original or ordinary meaning, in this text.

> *N.B. Like Part B, in this part of the test, you should not try spotting words or synonyms as these are usually distractors.*

This section requires a deeper understanding of meaning; in other words, you need to be able to understand *paradox, implied language, sarcasm, objectivity, or similar concepts*. Most importantly, you need to differentiate between facts and opinions.

There are some very useful websites where you can find more about these concepts and there are invaluable books you can use as a reference. I will try to collect some of these resources so you can prepare yourself for the test. There are also some examples given below.

Part A. 4 texts (20 questions) => Just to find specific information Fast reading, skimming, scanning
Part B. 6 short texts, MCQ (6 questions) => for deeper comprehension Reading for gist and purpose or function
Part C. 2 long texts (16 questions) => for higher level comprehension and judgement Infer meaning, attitude and point of view
N.B. In reading test, you are not allowed any <u>spelling mistakes</u>. In part A, the <u>exact word</u> is mentioned in the texts. (no change in structural or grammatical form) Some degree of <u>ambiguity tolerance</u> is required. (accept the uncertainty)

Suggested Approach to Reading

Part A:

1. Quickly <u>survey</u> the questions and texts
2. Do section 1, with best <u>guess</u> first and then <u>check</u> the answers
3. Go <u>text by text</u> not with numbers
4. If not sure, <u>skip</u> the question
5. Then go to section 2 and find <u>key words</u>
6. Guess where they might be
7. Go to each text and answer questions
8. Do the same procedure for section 3

Part B:

1. Read the question and answers
2. Make sure you understand them
3. You can paraphrase if you are not sure
4. Find the 'idea units'
5. Compare the idea units and find the <u>differences</u>
6. <u>Skim</u> or <u>read</u> the text and decide which <u>idea units</u> are mentioned/correct

Part C:

1. <u>Survey</u> the text
2. Read the question and answers
3. Make sure you <u>understand</u> them
4. You can <u>paraphrase</u> if you are not sure
5. Find the <u>'idea units'</u>
6. Compare the idea units and find the <u>differences</u>
7. <u>Understand </u>the <u>main idea</u> and <u>supporting idea units</u>
8. <u>Consider where</u> in the text the paragraph is
9. <u>Skim</u> or <u>read</u> the text and decide which <u>idea units</u> are mentioned/correct

Example: **Carlo Ancelotti will be given funds to strengthen Everton this summer**

Carlo Ancelotti has been assured Everton will spend this summer but the manager says the "character and personality" of his squad must also change to compete at the top end of the Premier League.

Ancelotti, his backroom team, players and senior staff have agreed wage deferrals as the club deals with the financial impact of Covid-19. Everton also posted a record loss of £111.9m in their accounts for 2018-19 and would risk breaching financial fair play (FFP) rules with another year of substantial losses.

The team's need for improvement was again laid bare in defeat at Tottenham on Monday – they have also lost at Liverpool, twice, Manchester City, Leicester, Chelsea and Arsenal this season – and, despite the financial uncertainty throughout football, Ancelotti insisted he can strengthen.

"I have assurances from the board that we are going to improve the squad," he said. Asked whether he must sell to buy, he replied: "No."

Ancelotti has been linked with a host of his former players, including James Rodríguez, Thiago Silva, Edinson Cavani and Adrien Rabiot. The club have made progress in the pursuit of the Lille defender Gabriel Magalhães.

"We need good players and the players that we are going to sign will be good players," Ancelotti said. "It doesn't matter whether they are young or old; with experience or without experience. It is important to have good players. The names that have been mentioned are the same names that were mentioned one year ago when I was in Napoli. They follow me!

"James Rodríguez? I like him a lot as a player. When I left Madrid, James Rodríguez followed me to Munich. But he followed me as a rumour to Napoli and now he is following me to Everton as a rumour. I have to be honest – I like him a lot. But he is a Real Madrid player and I think he will still be a Real Madrid player."

Ancelotti believes Everton's squad can be upgraded "without a lot of changes", provided the mentality improves of existing players. "It is important to improve the character and personality of the team," he said. "I can improve their knowledge on the training ground day by day but the mentality of the squad can also improve to compete better with the top-six teams in the Premier League."

https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/jul/08/carlo-ancelotti-funds-strengthen-everton-summer-james-rodriguez

Skimming is reading a text quickly to get a general idea of meaning. It can be contrasted with **scanning**, which is reading in order to find specific information, e.g. figures or names.

Example
A learner taking a reading exam decides to approach text by looking at the title, introductions, and any diagrams and sub-headings, then skim reading to get a clear general idea of what the text is about.

In the classroom
Skimming is a specific reading skill which is common in reading newspapers, messages and e-mails. It is important that learners understand that there is no need to read *every word* when skimming, so often teachers set this as a timed task to encourage speed.

Take the last paragraph for example; this is how we can skim and understand the meaning. Note that we do not need to read *all the words*, but most *nouns and verbs*, and then *adjectives and adverbs*; rarely prepositions, pronouns, or articles.

Ancelotti believes Everton's squad can be upgraded "without a lot of changes", provided the mentality improves of existing players. "It is important to improve the character and personality of the team," he said. "I can improve their knowledge on the training ground day by day but the mentality of the squad can also improve to compete better with the top-six teams in the Premier League."

Question: What is the register of language for these words (positive or negative)?

Upgraded

Improve

Character

Personality

Knowledge

Better

To find out deeper meaning and select the right answer, it is important to identify and compare 'Key Ideas'.

Identifying and comparing *key ideas*, excluding the untrue ones, and making a judgment:

a. A+B

b. A+C

c. A+B+C

Question: What was mentioned in the text? (Key ideas are shown in bold)

   a. **Teams** can be upgraded with better mentality of **all the staff.** (Everton not <u>teams</u>, <u>players</u>)
   b. **Everton** can be improved with better personality and character. (it is important, <u>not can be</u>)
   c. **Everton** needs players with **better mentality**.

Question: What was the **purpose** of this paragraph?

To emphasize we need new players.

Question: **Why** did the **writer** mention Ancelotti's sentences?

   a. To mention that mentality is very important for the team.
   b. To emphasize we need new players to improve the team.
   c. To say that improvement is possible with better mentality.
   d. To say that personality and character are important for improvement.

Question: **What** did Ancelotti say?

Popular pages in the reading section

1

<u>**Scanning** a text means looking through it quickly to find specific information, and is one way to read a text quickly.</u>

2

<u>**Guessing meaning** of unknown words entails using context, prefixes, suffixes and roots and can speed up reading.</u>

3

<u>**Summarising** is one of three ways of using another writer's work in your own (along with quotation and paraphrase).</u>

4

<u>**Critical reading** involves questioning a text, rather than assuming everything it contains is factual.</u>

5

<u>**Surveying a text** involves taking a broad look at a text to decide whether it is worth reading more closely.</u>

6

<u>**Establishing a purpose** before reading a text determines how you read it, which may not be from start to finish.</u>

https://www.eapfoundation.com/reading/skills/skimming/

This affects its format, style and language and characterises it as part of a genre. Many genres provide opportunities to practise specific reading skills such as identifying topic and supporting sentences. We can also use genres to show examples of cohesion. Cohesive devices are words that 'glue together' words in a sentence or sentences in a paragraph.

This unit looks at different reading and writing genres.

Part 1 highlights how genres are exploited in the classroom, helping learners to identify the purpose and intended audience of a text and how this affects format, style and language.

Part 2 shows an example of how a teacher exploits a model text for a film review.

Part 3 looks at how a teacher uses authentic texts to introduce her learners to the genre of advertising.

Procedure:

Download the session notes below the videos. The notes contain discussion, video-viewing and reflection tasks. Follow the tasks by going through the video in sequence. The video and session notes are designed as self-study resources to be worked through together. Techniques are transferable to other classes in other contexts.

How to Skim Text

By **Richard Sutz, Peter Weverka**

Skimming — getting the essence from reading material without reading all the words — boils down to knowing what parts to read and what parts to pass by. Following are some tips and techniques for recognizing what is important to read in the act of skimming.

Know what you want

Before you start skimming, ask yourself what you want to get from the book or article under your nose. Think of two or three terms that describe what you want to know, and as you skim, keep an eye out for those two or three terms. Aimlessly skimming with no particular purpose can cause drowsiness, and eventually, sleep.

Read vertically as well as horizontally

When skimming, you move your eyes vertically as much as you move your eyes horizontally. In other words, you move your eyes down the page as much as you move them from side to side. Skimming is a bit like running downstairs. Yes, you should take one step at a time, and running downstairs is reckless, but you also get there faster by running.

Think like the author

Every article, book, and Web page is written to make a point of some kind, and if you can detect the author's strategies for making his point, you can separate the important from the unimportant material in the course of your

reading. You can focus on the original, meaningful material and skip over the material that just supports the author's argument without advancing it.

Detecting the author's strategies requires you to put yourself in his place. Besides noticing the material on the page, notice *how* he presents the material. See whether you can recognize how the author places background material, secondary arguments, tangential information, and just plain frippery.

Pre-read before you start skimming

Examine an article before you read it. By prereading an article before you skim, you can pinpoint the parts of the article that require your undivided attention and the parts that you can skip.

Try to detect the main idea in the introductory paragraphs

The introductory paragraphs usually express the main idea, argument, or goal of an article or chapter. Read these paragraphs closely. They tell you what the author's aim is, which can help you decide early on whether the article or chapter is worth reading in detail.

Read the first sentence in each paragraph

The introductory sentence of each paragraph usually describes what follows in the paragraph. When you skim, read the first sentence in each paragraph and then decide whether the rest of the paragraph deserves a read. If it doesn't, move on.

Don't necessarily read complete sentences

When skimming, you don't even have to read complete sentences. If the start of a sentence holds no promise of the sentence giving you the information you want, skip to the next sentence. Read the start of sentences with an eye

to whether they will yield useful information and read them all the way through only if they appear to be useful at first glance.

Skip examples and proofs

Authors often present examples to prove a point, but if you believe the point doesn't need proving, you can skip the examples.

Defining Speed Reading

Speed reading isn't a whole different way of reading; it's just a more focused way of reading. Reading engages the eyes, ears, mouth, and, of course, the brain. Speed reading engages these senses even more than normal reading because you use your senses and brain power even more efficiently.

Speed reading is

- **Seeing:** The first step in reading anything is seeing the words. With speed reading, you use your sight in specific ways:

  o **You read several words in a single glance.** Unless you're encountering words you don't know or haven't read before, you don't read words one at a time.

  o **You expand your vision so that you can read and understand many words in a single glance.** A very good speed reader can read, see, and process 10 to 14 words at once.

  o **You expand your vision to read vertically as well as horizontally on the page.** Speed readers can read and

understand words on two or three different lines in a single glance.

- **Silent reading:** Most people hear words when they read. You may speak words to yourself because you learned to read with the sound-it-out method. The problem with sounding out words when you read is that you read not at the speed you think but rather at the speed you talk. Sounding it out is fine for beginning readers, but at some point you have to dispense with sound if you want to be a speed reader. Saying the words, even if you only whisper them inside the confines of your skull, takes time and prevents you from reading as fast as you can.

- **Decoding the words:** When you come across a word in your reading that you don't know or recognize, you have to decode it. You break it into syllables, try to pronounce it, and see whether it's related to words you know. You try to get its meaning, and if you can't do that on your own, you consult a dictionary or other reference source. The more you read, the fewer words you have to decode because reading enlarges your vocabulary. It introduces you to more words.

- **Comprehending:** The purpose of reading is to comprehend — to learn something new, see the world from a different perspective, or maybe just get information to pass an exam or prepare for a business meeting. How well you comprehend what you read is determined by your

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    o **Reading speed:** When you don't read at the right speed, your comprehension is diminished. One of the skills you acquire as a speed reader is knowing when to slow down and when to speed up. The fastest speed readers adjust the speed at which they read, just as the fastest stock car racers slow down when they're in a crowded field or on a slick patch of roadway. They adjust their speed according to the type of reading they're doing.

    o **Breadth of vocabulary:** Having a large vocabulary is a must for speed readers. You can't get away from it.

- o **Degree of familiarity with the subject matter:** How strong a background you have in the topic you're reading about determines how well you comprehend what you read. Obviously, you have a head start if you're traveling in territory you're familiar with and you know the jargon already.
- **Concentrating:** All reading requires a certain amount of concentration. Speed reading, however, requires sustained, forceful concentration because when you speed read, you do many things at once. As you see and read the words on the page, you also remain alert to the main ideas that the author wants to present. You have to think along with the author and detect how she presents the material so you can pin down the main ideas.

  As you read, you have to read with more perspective and separate the details from weightier stuff. You have to know when to skim, when to read fast, and when to slow down to get the gist of it.

Debunking Speed-Reading Myths

You may have some preconceived ideas about what speed reading is. Don't worry, many people have erroneous ideas about the practice of speed reading, including the myths in the following list, all of which are false:

- **You don't enjoy reading as much when you speed read.** On the contrary! Speed reading is efficient reading. When you speed read, you're a better reader — you get more pleasure and meaning out of the books, articles, and Web pages that you read. Many people develop a love of reading only after they learn to speed read.
- **You don't comprehend as well when you speed read.** Speed reading is the act of reading with higher levels of concentration. What's more, by reading several words at a time rather than one word after the other, your comprehension increases. You can read words in context and derive more meaning from the words you read.

- **You skip words when you speed read.** Wrong again. Speed readers don't fixate their eyes on all the words as they read, but that doesn't mean they skip the words. Speed reading entails reading words in clumps, or groups. You read more than one word at a time, but no word gets skipped.

- **You have to run your finger down the page or use a pacer when you speed read.** A *pacer* is a visual guide, such as your finger or a pen, that marks where you read on the page. Most people have a stereotypical image of a speed reader as a crazed-looking individual dragging his finger or a pacer quickly down the page in the act of reading. However, you don't *need* a pacer to speed read. A pacer can be helpful in the early stages of speed reading, but you're wise to abandon it after you get the hang of speed reading.

  To make a pacer, cut a piece of blank paper to a size that's comfortable for you, then cut a window out of the paper that's the size you'd like to use (a small window if you want to see just one or two words, or a larger one if you'd rather see most of a sentence). See the following figure.

How to Stop Vocalizing and Become a Speed Reader

Stopping yourself from vocalizing is an essential first step to becoming a speed reader. *Vocalizing* is hearing words as you read — you may even move your lips and quietly pronounce each word. If you're saying or hearing every word, you're reading at the speed you talk, not at the speed you think. Use these tips to kick your vocalization habit to the curb:

- **Read for meaning rather than sound.** Reading without vocalizing has a lot in common with listening to someone speak. When someone speaks, you hear the words, but you only hear them in connection with whatever thoughts and ideas the speaker is trying to convey. The same is true of reading without vocalizing: You read words for meaning, not sound. You see the word on the page and respond to its meaning without the intermediary step of hearing the word's sound. You don't read the words as words — you read *units of meaning* (like ideas, thoughts, and descriptions) whose building blocks happen to be words.

- **Stop your vocalization motor,** To prevent your lips from moving when you read and disengage your vocal system, try putting your mouth to work at something besides reading. Chew gum, or, if your lip movements are especially pronounced, place a pencil or pen between your lips as you read.

- **Silence your inner reading voice.** Some techniques to try for training yourself to read without hearing your inner reading voice:

    - **Try to perceive the words rather than see them.** Imagine that each word is a symbol (not a sound) that conveys a meaning.
    - **Turn off your ears.** Pretend your ears have a volume control and turn it to the mute setting.
    - **Widen your field of vision.** By taking in more words on a line, you force yourself to read more words at a time, and this helps prevent vocalization.
    - **Identify the thought units in sentences, not the words, and read thought unit by thought unit rather than word by word.**
    - **Concentrate harder when you read.** Much of being a speed reader comes down to concentrating harder than you used to.

The Importance of Eye Fixations to Speed Reading

By **Richard Sutz, Peter Weverka**

A major component of speed reading is *eye fixation,* a point where your eyes come to rest as you read. Readers who make fewer eye fixations read faster because they take in more words with each fixation. The number of words you can process in an eye fixation depends on your vision span, your vocabulary, and your familiarity with what you're reading.

Eye fixations and vision span

The wider your vision span is, the more words you can process in an eye fixation and the faster you can read. Acquiring the ability to see many words at a time is essential for speed reading. To see why, consider this sentence:

The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.
A slow reader with a narrow vision span reads this sentence slowly in six to nine eye fixations, sometimes taking in only a single word per fixation. A fast reader with a wider vision span can read the sentence in two or three eye fixations. This reader has a stronger comprehension because she reads the sentence phrase by phrase, and phrases convey more meaning than individual words.

Eye fixations and vocabulary

To see how eye fixations correlate to vocabulary, read these lines carefully and try to understand their meaning:

Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,

And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.

Unless you understand Middle English or you're familiar with the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer (these lines come from *The Canterbury Tales*), you had

trouble with these lines because few of the words are in your vocabulary. You didn't recognize the words, so you had to examine them one at a time and probably read the lines in 15 (or more) eye fixations, one for each word.

Reading this translation of Chaucer's lines is considerably easier because all or most of the words are in your vocabulary. Notice how much faster you read the translation:

Filled with moral virtue was his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

You read the translation faster because you needed fewer eye fixations to read it. Because the words were familiar, you didn't have to dwell on them, and you could read more than one word at a time.

The larger your vocabulary is, the more words you recognize when you read. You can take in more words with an eye fixation when you recognize the words, which is why enlarging your vocabulary is essential to being a speed reader.

Eye fixations and topic familiarity

How familiar you are with a topic is another factor influencing how many words you can see in a single eye fixation. When you read about a topic in your area of expertise or field of interest, you read more confidently, and you're able to read more quickly with fewer eye fixations because you're at home with the author's words and terminology.

Your background, your general knowledge, your education — these factors also determine how fast you can read. People with a breadth of knowledge read faster because more is familiar to them. By making reading more efficient and pleasurable, speed reading encourages you to read, which in turn widens your breadth of knowledge and makes you read even faster.

Speed Reading Fundamental: Eye Fixations

By **Richard Sutz, Peter Weverka**

For your eyes to see anything, they have to be still. You can't swing your eyes wildly around the room and expect to see anything but a blur. The same is true of reading words on a page. To see words, your eyes must be still, but they must also move left-to-right across the page to take in words in the act of reading.

How can your eyes be still and move at the same time? The answer is *eye fixations.* When you read, your eyes move in fits and starts across the page. They fixate on an individual word or a group of words and then move along to the next word or word group when you have comprehended the first one. In this way, you read across each line of text.

For many years, researchers took for granted the idea that everybody reads one word at a time. They believed that fast readers were simply people who could identify and comprehend individual words quickly, one after the next.

Starting about 1910, however, researchers conducted experiments to see precisely what happens when you read. They discovered eye fixations. They noticed that the eyes do not move at a steady rate across the page but rather by fits and starts. They also discovered that the fewer eye fixations you have when reading, the faster you read. This discovery was the beginning of modern speed reading.

You can conduct your own experiment to see how eye fixations work by following these steps:

1. Recruit a friend who doesn't mind letting you watch him or her read.
   If a friend isn't handy, put on a pair of dark glasses and go to a library or waiting room where a number of people are reading.

2. Give your friend a book or magazine article to read and observe his or her eyes in the act of reading.

3. Notice how the reader's eyes move.

They remain for a fraction of a second in one place and then jerk to the right, where they remain for another fraction of a second and jerk to the right again. What you see are eye fixations. After arriving at the end of the line, the eyes sweep to the left and fixate on a position at the start of the next line, and the eye fixations begin anew.

4. To count how many eye fixations occur on a line, ask the reader to tell you when he or she comes to the end of each line. (You'd better skip this step if you're watching a stranger read.)

Some lines of text require more eye fixations to read than others, depending on a number of factors, including how long the line is, how familiar the reader is with the topic, and whether the words in the line are in the reader's vocabulary.

Skimming as a Speed Reading Technique

By **Richard Sutz, Peter Weverka**

Speed reading is a good way to absorb a lot of printed information quickly, but sometimes you just need to get the gist of what is being written about, without all the details. That's when knowing how to skim text can be helpful.

When you skim a page, you take the main ideas from the reading material without reading all the words. You look for and seize upon words that appear to give the main meaning. Readers skim when time is short or when they need to understand the general ideas but not the particulars of an article or book. Skimming occurs at three to four times the normal reading speed. For that reason, your reading comprehension takes a nosedive when you skim.

Studies show that people read and comprehend text on a computer screen more slowly than they read and comprehend printed material. Readers can't skim as efficiently on their computer screens either. When you read or skim a Web page on your computer, do so more slowly than usual if you want to read and skim efficiently.

Skimming is taking the most important information from the page without reading all the words. (The term comes from the act of skimming milk, when the dairy farmer skims the cream — the richest material — from the top of the milk before it's processed.) Strictly speaking, skimming isn't a reading technique but rather a scavenging technique. You hunt for the choicest information and hope important material doesn't pass you by.

When you speed read, you skim to the extent that you don't fixate on all the words. In effect, you weed out some words and focus on the remaining ones. However, skimming takes the notion of passing by some words to another level. In the act of skimming, you focus only on the essential ideas and skip over the insignificant, marginal, and secondary.

The first step in recognizing the essential ideas when you skim is knowing when to skim. Some materials and situations practically require skimming:

- Needlessly lengthy white papers and convoluted business reports are almost impossible not to skim.

- Newspapers, with their ready-made word clumps, are designed for skimming.

- If you're on a time crunch, you often have to skim because you don't have enough time to read the material.

Often, a work's opening paragraphs and the concluding paragraphs present the author's main ideas. Opening paragraphs often outline what the author plans to prove, and closing paragraphs explain why the author's proof is justified. Read these paragraphs closely; don't skim them.

https://www.dummies.com/education/language-arts/speed-reading/skimming-as-a-speed-reading-technique/

Skimming the text

This reading strategy consists of reading the text quickly in order to find out what it is about and how it is organised. This can be done by reading its introduction as this is likely to briefly say what the text will be about. Titles, headings and subheadings also need to be read because they introduce the text and its sections and subsections. Visual representations of the content, such as images, diagrams and tables, can be used for the same purpose.

Finally, it is also very useful to read the first sentence of each paragraph. This sentence, which is called the topic sentence, is normally the first sentence of each paragraph and announces its topic.

Therefore, to quickly obtain information about the text, you can:

- read the title, the introduction, any headings and subheadings, and the conclusion
- read the first sentence of each paragraph (the topic sentence)
- read the concluding sentence of each paragraph
- read the words highlighted in bold
- look at illustrations (pictures, diagrams, tables).

As texts differ, you may not be able to follow all these strategies all of the time when skimming a text. For example, not all texts have illustrations or headings, and some short texts and extracts may not end with a conclusion.

To practise skim reading you are going to read a text taken from the Open University course KG004 *Improving health and wellbeing*. **Download** the text now.

Activity 1

Timing:Allow approximately 10 minutes

Read **only** the introductory paragraph, the headings and the topic sentence of each paragraph. Then answer the questions that follow. I recommend printing out this text as you will refer to it again while working through the next few activities.

Question 1

Having skim read the text you should now have an overview of the information it contains. To see if you have, try to match the following statements to the paragraphs in which they were mentioned.

Over-nutrition in rich and poor countries

Under-nutrition in rich and poor countries

Negative effects of eating highly nutritious foods

Definition of type 2 diabetes

Effects of low-calorie diets in children

Causes of under-nutrition

Drag each answer (above) into the correct slot (below).

Question 2

Having skim read the text, which of the following headings best describes the topic of the whole text?

1. Health issues in developing countries
2. Forms of malnutrition
3. Solutions to malnutrition

Reveal answer

Through skim reading you have learned a quick way to discover what the text is about and how it is organised. This information will help you decide **what** to read: all the text or only some sections. You will also be able to decide **how** you want to read the text.

In-depth reading to find the key points

If, after skimming the text, you decide to read it more closely and gain an in-depth understanding of its topic, the next step consists of reading the full text and identifying the key points. An effective way to identify key ideas is to highlight important parts of the text by underlining or using a highlighter pen.

This approach is designed to select and focus only on the core meanings of an extract. Highlighting involves making judgements about what is important. It is not about capturing every detail but getting a general overview of the key ideas.

Therefore, it is important to highlight only very few words and phrases in each paragraph. Paragraphs usually focus on one key point and, while they may include an illustrative example that may be useful, it is the main point that you need to identify first and foremost.

To illustrate this technique, I have highlighted the first two paragraphs of the text on malnutrition. (To be readable on screen, they are shown in bold rather than actually 'highlighted'.)

[P1] To stay healthy, the body's needs for energy and nutrients must be met. This is particularly important in growing children as damage inflicted may not be reversible and can affect normal development. People whose **diet lacks the necessary nutrients** suffer from **malnutrition**, a condition that includes both **over-nutrition** and **under-nutrition** and is considered a **risk factor for health**.

Under-nutrition

[P2] **Under-nutrition** is in news reports of famines in **poor countries**, but it can also be found in developed countries. **In industrialised countries**, under-nutrition can be seen in **young people who have eating disorders** such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia, where the amount of **energy they consume in food is less than the needs of their body**.

As you can see, in the first paragraph I have only highlighted the word 'malnutrition' and words that help to define it. In the second paragraph, I have highlighted words that refer to the location of under-nutrition (poor countries, industrialised countries), information about under-nutrition in industrialised countries (young people, eating disorders) and a definition of under-nutrition. I have not highlighted the examples.

You will find that more words and phrases need to be highlighted if a paragraph contains a great deal of core information. This is why several words and phrases are highlighted in paragraph 2.

The next activity gives you the opportunity to practise highlighting a text. You will need to print out the text and have a pen or highlighter pen handy.

Activity 2

Timing: Allow approximately 15 minutes

If you haven't already done so, download the **text on malnutrition** you skim read in Activity 7 and print it out. Read Paragraphs 3 to 7 and underline or highlight the key points they make. If you find new words, at this stage only look them up if they are essential to understand the overall meaning of a sentence. When you have finished, compare your highlighted text with mine.

Note: You will return to this text in a later activity so please keep your highlighted copy.

Reveal answer

Making sense of texts containing difficult words

An academic text may contain many words you don't know, but it may still be possible to understand its content by following a range of strategies. You may already be familiar with these strategies as it is quite common, when coming across new words in everyday life, to try to work out their meaning from the context in which they are used. This context may include, for example, the pictures and other words that surround the text.

The advert shown in Figure 5, for example, contains terms I don't fully understand, such as emphysema, but the other words in the list, the picture and my general knowledge about smoking help me understand that it must be a deadly disease. This contributes to my overall understanding of the message conveyed by the advert.
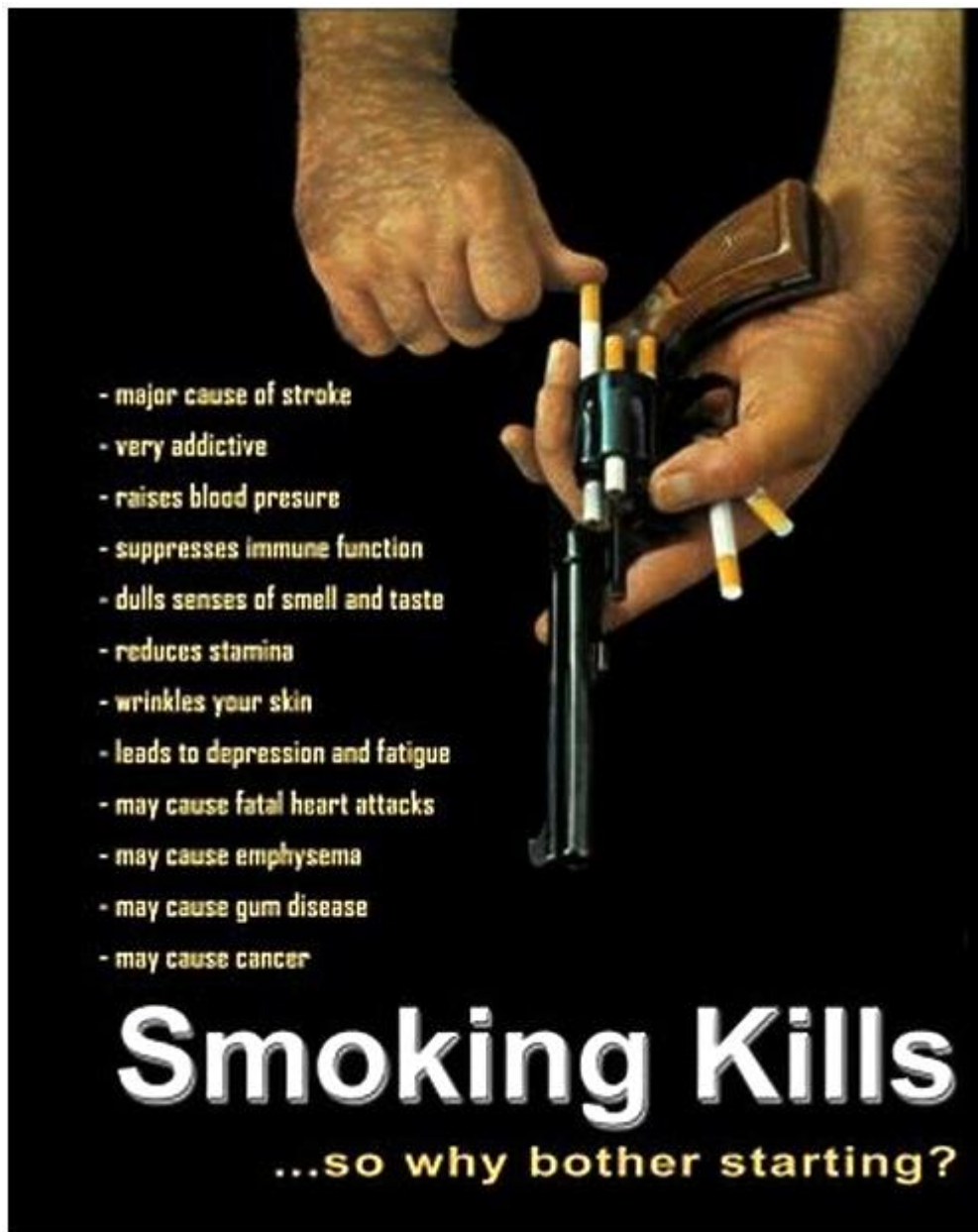
Figure 5 Anti-smoking advert

Rather than looking up every word in the dictionary, experienced readers make sense of new words by drawing on the following strategies:

- their background knowledge about the topic

- the context in which a word is used: the words, sentences and examples that follow it

- their understanding about the way in which words are constructed in English

- their knowledge of other languages. Many academic words will be familiar if you have some knowledge of French or another language derived from Latin.

You will practise these strategies in the following activity.

Activity 3

Timing: Allow approximately 10 minutes

Read the scenario below. What strategies could you use to help the student? Make some notes in the box below before looking at the answer.

Scenario

A fellow student is struggling to fully understand the following extract because it contains some words that are new to him. How might you help him use both his general knowledge about language and the context to understand the meaning of the words in bold?

Extract

When people suffer from under-nutrition, they are often **deficient** in vitamins and minerals needed by the body. For example, they may not have enough Vitamin A. They will become **lethargic**, less active and be unable to concentrate. If the situation continues, they may develop **life-threatening** diseases. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2012) reports that 100 million children under the age of five are **underweight** and 35% of all deaths of children under five are caused by malnutrition. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, **gallstones**, arthritis, high blood pressure and some types of cancer.

The ability to use these strategies comes with practice. You may want to read regularly and use a paper or an online dictionary to look up only essential and key terms. If English is not your first language, it is also useful to read online news and good quality English language newspapers regularly. For example, you could try reading the news from one of the following websites:

- **BBC News**

- **The Guardian**

- **The Telegraph**

- **The Independent**

- **EuroNews**

In this section you have looked at an active reading method consisting of five steps. If your purpose for reading is to identify useful information that can be used in an essay or revised before an exam, you will also need to make notes. Note-making techniques are explained in the next section.

https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=19202&section=3.5