Chapter: 17 The Art of Effective Reading

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

•

understand the importance of reading in achieving success both in academic and profes-

sional life

•

acquire the various types of reading skills that one may employ while reading dif erent

kinds of texts

•

learn the four basic steps in the process of reading

•

get to know the basic hurdles in ef cient reading and the tips to overcome them

•

know the relation between speed reading and success and also learn the ways to increase

your reading speed

Learning Objectives

Resolve to edge in a little reading every day, if it is but a single sentence. If you gain ﬁ fteen

minutes a day, it will make itself felt at the end of the year.

–Horace Mann (1796–1859)

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man —

Francis Bacon, the famous essayist, has rightly observed in his well-known essay

‘Of Studies’. It is true that of all the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and

writing—reading is probably the most crucial skill. It is so because a good reader

can rise above the disadvantage of limited opportunity received in terms of listen-

ing, speaking, and writing a language. By all means, effective reading skills are

vital to achieving success not only in one’s academic but also professional life.

Usually, it is observed that only good readers are good communicators. It is a skill

that cannot be ignored. It is advisable to acquire efﬁ cient reading skills as early

as possible.

17.2 NEED FOR DEVELOPING EFFICIENT READING SKILLS

You deﬁ nitely know how to read. But the question is whether you know how

to read skilfully and artfully. Skilful reading is reading for speciﬁ c information

for a better learning experience in a short span of time. It is an art which can be

learnt easily by using a systematic approach and by undergoing formal training.

This chapter will help you learn this art. You will surely be able to know how to

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use diverse ways so that you can enhance your effectiveness and make your future reading

experience more rewarding and enriching.

Have you ever noticed that we do not approach a novel, or a report, or a personal letter,

or an email in a similar manner? In fact, the truth is that while reading, you employ different

reading speeds and different approaches to them. However, it is also true that different people

have varied speeds of reading and understanding. So, as a student, who has to read much for

academic pursuance, and as a future professional, there is a dire need to learn the skills and

techniques of artful reading. Before we talk about these techniques and types, let us know the

major beneﬁ ts that you may achieve by developing the art of efﬁ cient and artful reading.

17.3 BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE READING

Here are the beneﬁ ts of effective reading:

1. Effective reading can provide you with a ‘comprehensible input’ from the book or docu-

ment that you read.

2. It can enhance your general ability to use other language skills such as listening, speaking,

and writing.

3. It can enhance your vocabulary, that is, you can always learn new words, phrases, and

expressions.

4. Effective reading also helps you keep your mind focused on the material and prevents it

from unnecessary distractions.

5. Moreover, this enables you to extract useful information much more efﬁ ciently within a

limited time.

6. It can help you consolidate both previously learned language and knowledge.

7. It helps in building conﬁ dence as you start reading longer, and later, voluminous texts.

8. It gives you pleasure and relaxation as books are the best and most reliable friends.

9. Effective reading facilitates the development of various other skills, such as making predic-

tions, comparing and contrasting facts, creating samples, hypothesizing, reorganizing the

message as transmitted by the text, improving your critical thinking, and hence developing

a sharp acumen with passage of time.

17.4 SPEED OF READING

An average college student reads between 150 and 250 words per minute. A ‘good’ reading

speed is around 250 to 400 words per minute, but some people can read even 1000 words per

minute or more. However, research shows that there is difference in the rate of reading for dif-

ferent purposes ( Table 17.1 ).

Table 17.1 Rates of Reading

Purpose of ReadingNo. of Words (words per minute/wpm)

•

Reading for memorization

•

Fewer than 100

•

Reading for learning

•

100–200

•

Reading for comprehension• 200–400

•

Skimming

•

400–700

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Understanding the role of speed in the reading process is essential. Research shows that a close

relation can be observed between reading speed and understanding. Proper reading training can

help you increase both your rate of reading and comprehension. It is a vital fact about reading

that plodding, which means reading word by word, reduces understanding rather than increas-

ing it.

Actually, most adults are able to increase their reading rate signiﬁ cantly and rather rapidly

without lowering their comprehension. Merely reading more rapidly, without actual improve-

ment in the basic reading habits, however, usually results in lowered comprehension. Broadly

categorized, there are three main factors involved in improving reading speed:

• The desire to improve

• Conscious efforts in using newly acquired techniques

• A motivation to practise

With these, almost anyone can double his/her speed of reading while maintaining equal or even

better comprehension.

Table 17.2 gives the differences between an efﬁ cient and inefﬁ cient reader.

Table 17.2 Dif erences Between Ef cient and Inef cient Readers

An Ef cient ReaderAn Inef cient Reader

•

Always reads for ideas or information• Tries to read words

•

Reads group of words/multi-phrases• Reads word by word

•

Quickly adjusts his/her speed of reading

to the nature of the text

•

Reads the text from the beginning till the

end

•

Sets the purpose of reading right in the

beginning

•

Reads everything and deliberately goes

slow while reading

•

Reads smoothly

•

Reads the information again and again to

fi gure out a clear understanding of the tex

•

Visualizes ideas

•

Vocalizes or sub-vocalizes words while

reading

•

Has a good vocabulary in that subject• Has limited vocabulary which hampers his/

her speed and understanding

•

Continuously keeps improving his/her

pace of reading

•

Rarely attempts speed reading

•

Properly tries to sort out the material as

critical, interesting, analytical, etc.

•

Reads everything indiscriminately

17.5FOUR BASIC STEPS TO EFFECTIVE READING

While reading a text to learn something, you need to follow the following four basic steps:

1. Figure out the purpose of reading a particular text . You can identify suitable reading

strategies and use your background knowledge of the topic in order to anticipate the

contents.

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2. Spot the parts of the text relevant to the identiﬁ ed purpose and ignore the rest . This selec-

tivity enables you to focus on particular elements of information from the text. So, you are

able to sift through the information, which in turn reduces the amount of information you

have to hold in short-term memory.

3. Choose the appropriate reading strategy that suits your purpose . Select the strategy that

is suited to the reading task in that particular context and use that strategy in an interactive

manner. This will develop your understanding as well as conﬁ dence.

4. Test or assess your comprehension during reading and also when the reading task is com-

pleted . Monitoring comprehension helps you make out the inconsistencies and discrepan-

cies in total comprehension of the text. At this step, you can also learn to use alternative

strategies.

17.6 OVERCOMING COMMON OBSTACLES

Let us now learn the major hurdles in developing efﬁ cient reading. These problems are as dis-

cussed below.

17.6.1 Lack of Concentration

Poor concentration directly emanates from poor reading habits. If we are not used to reading,

it often appears to be an unpleasant task when we are forced to do it. In such circumstances the

mind begins to drift. However, since we know that there is no escape from reading, we need to

cultivate an active interest in our reading assignments. Gradually, our concentration begins to

improve if we consciously start taking interest in the reading activity.

17.6.2 Eye Fixation

While reading, when one is unable to progress well beyond a thought, expression, or word, it is

regarded as eye ﬁ xation . This is often caused because of lack of training, and cripples our reading

efﬁ ciency. To overcome this, try to divide a sen-

tence into certain thought units, and don’t ﬁ xate

on a particular word or expression for long.

17.6.3 Regression

Just like eye ﬁ xation, regression too creeps into

our reading habits because of lack of training.

When we are unable to understand an idea, we

habitually go back to the part where it occurs

in a passage. It clearly suggests incompetence

in reading and comprehension skills. Enhanced

reading habits with enthusiasm and interest can

help you overcome this problem. For efﬁ cient

and artful reading, you should make your eye

move over at least 2–3 words in one go and let

it glide over the text in a rhythm. Since reading

is an intensive process, if trained well, the eye

quickly moves to assimilate text.

Don’t Let Your Mind Wander while Reading

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17.6.4 Reading Aloud or Turning the Head from Side to Side

Often we see mothers telling their little tots to read aloud from their books to them, so that they

can also ﬁ nish their kitchen work while they help their kids improve their reading skills! This,

however, sometimes leads to poor concentration while reading, as their primary objective in

such reading becomes proper articulation of certain words and expressions. Similarly, moving

or gliding a pen, pencil, or scale through the text are also not worth imbibing, as any added

activity besides reading and comprehension tends to affect your understanding of the concept.

Ideally, our eyes should see and our mind should read the text before us.

17.6.5Indiscriminate Use of the Dictionary

Some damage to reading habits is also done because of lack of guidance about the proper uti-

lization of the dictionary. Some of our students are even misled into cramming the dictionary

they possess. Remember, a dictionary is not meant for this purpose, and you don’t learn words

by cramming them. For picking up more words, work conscientiously at least on some part of

your reading material everyday. Observe carefully how the words and expressions are used in

a given context. Look up the meaning of all such words in the dictionary to understand their

speciﬁ c usage, and the words similar and dissimilar to them. It has to be followed by using all

such words and expressions frequently in your speaking and writing tasks.

Another misuse of the dictionary is the tendency to refer to it the moment one comes across a

word one ﬁ nds difﬁ cult to understand. However, when we rush to look for the meaning of a word

in the dictionary the moment we confront it, we lose our spontaneity in reading. Moreover, most of

us start with a modest vocabulary; hence, the number of words which appear unfamiliar to us are

many in number. Repeatedly looking into the dictionary for every such word also makes us weary

of the whole process of reading and we tend to give up very soon. Therefore, go through your read-

ing assignments without taking such breaks; encircle the words and expressions you are unable to

understand. Once you have ﬁ nished the entire assignment, or a least some sizable chunk of it, turn

to the dictionary to understand the words. Even as you do so, try to scan the target word from differ-

ent perspectives. Try to learn its pronunciation, identify its class, its singular and plural forms, its

different meanings and usages, and the words which are similar to it and those that are dissimilar.

Given below are a few more obstacles that you need to overcome while reading:

1. Reading becomes a cumbersome activity when you skip the major part of the text and are

in a hurry to ﬁ nish it.

2. When you do not read a longer text at stretch for at least an hour to allow yourself to

develop interest in it, you cannot enjoy reading.

3. When your mind is preoccupied with other thoughts rather than the message that you are

reading, the time spent is just wasted.

4. Sometimes students have the tendency to read aloud, which is called vocalization. They

do so because they feel they should not get distracted while reading. However, this kind of

reading not only mars their speed of reading but also their comprehension of the text.

5. Reading becomes an uphill task when you have an unfriendly approach towards it.

6. Reading becomes boring when you do not select a book or text for reading according to

your linguistic and cognitive level.

7. One cannot read faster in an effort to remember everything rather than to remember

selectively.

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17.7 TYPES

Now, for learning the art of reading, you should know the four basic types of reading skills that

a reader may use in any language. These types will be discussed in this section.

17.7.1 Skimming

Skimming is used to quickly gather the most important information or ‘gist’ from the document

or novel that you read. For this, you should make your eyes run over the text, noting important

information. You may also go through the contents of the chapters rapidly, picking out and

understanding the key words and concepts. For example, while reading the newspaper in the

morning, you quickly try to get the general news of the day and discover which articles you

would like to read in more detail.

17.7.2 Scanning

Scanning is used to ﬁ nd a particular piece of information. In this type of reading, you allow

your eyes to run over the text, looking for the speciﬁ c piece of information that you need. You

use scanning when you go through your schedule or meeting plans, look for speciﬁ c advertise-

ments, or some speciﬁ c information in a book, etc. This is the most effective way of getting

information from magazines—scan the table of contents or indexes and turn directly to inter-

esting articles to arrive at the speciﬁ c information.

17.7.3 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is used to obtain a general understanding of a subject. It includes reading of

the longer texts for pleasure, and business reports to know about the general trends. In this type

of reading, you should not worry if you do not understand each and every word. You can use

this type of reading to improve your general knowledge of business procedures, or to know the

latest marketing strategy. Also, while you read a novel before going to bed, or magazine articles

that interest you, you use your extensive reading skills.

17.7.4 Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is used on shorter texts in order to extract detailed information. It includes very

close and accurate reading for details. You use this skill to grasp the details of a speciﬁ c situation.

In this case, it is important for you to understand each word, information, or fact. When you read

your text book for understanding the concepts or various theories, you have to read intensively. You

also require to read every single detail when you want to go for an insurance claim or want to sign

a contract. Intensive reading skills help you understand and interpret the text, infer its central idea,

observe the common thread that runs through it, and intuit its overall purpose and signiﬁ cance.

17.8 METHODS OF READING

There are several methods of reading, with differing rates, for different kinds of material and

purposes.

Sub-vocalized reading It combines sight reading with internal sounding of the words as if

spoken. It is a bad habit that slows down the pace of both reading and comprehension. However,

some studies show that it helps the readers better, particularly while reading complex texts.

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Speed reading It is a method for increasing reading speed without a reduction in comprehen-

sion or retention. With effort, you can acquire a speed of as much as 1000 words per minute.

PhotoReading PhotoReading is different from “regular reading” or “speed reading”. It is a

way to process and understand information than to read it. It claims to process and store the

information merely by looking at the page by use, the whole mind rather than only the left or

right side of our brain.

In this method, you use speed reading techniques with an additional technique of photoreading

to increase your reading speed, comprehension, and retention.

Proofreading It is a kind of reading for detecting typographical errors in a printed text. One

can learn to do it rapidly, and professional proofreaders typically acquire the ability to do so at

high rates, faster for some kinds of material than for others.

Structure–Proposition–Evaluation (SPE) Mortimer Adler popularized this method in his

book How to Read a Book , mainly for non-ﬁ ction treatise, in which one reads a writing in three

phases: (1) for the structure of the work, (2) for the logical propositions or progression made,

and (3) for evaluation of the merits of the arguments and conclusions. This method demands

suspended judgement of the work or its arguments until they are fully understood .

Survey–Question–Read–Recite–Review (SQ3R) This method involves immaculate and

perfect reading, that is, you read so as to teach what is read or be able to explain or apply the

knowledge obtained in other domains. In this method, the reader absorbs the information and

uses it without having to refer to notes or the book again.

Multiple intelligences-based method This method draws upon the reader’s diverse ways of

thinking and knowing to enrich his/her appreciation of the text. Reading is fundamentally a

linguistic activity. Most readers use several intelligences, such as auditory, visual, and logical

intelligence, while reading, and making a habit of doing so in a more disciplined manner, that

is, constantly or after every paragraph, which results in more vivid and memorable experience.

17.9 APPROACHES TO EFFICIENT READING

You should know that forced acceleration may destroy conﬁ dence in one’s ability to read. The

obvious solution, then, is to increase your reading pace as a part of the total improvement of the

whole reading process.

In general, decrease your speed when you experience certain difﬁ culties ( Table 17.3 ).

Table 17.3 Dif erent Suggested Approaches to Reading (By Decreasing the Speed)

Type of Dif cultySuggested Approach

Unfamiliar terminology

Try to understand it in the context at that point; otherwise, read

on and return to it later.

Dif cult sentence and

paragraph structure

Slow down enough to enable you to untangle them and get the

accurate context for the passage.

Unfamiliar or abstract conceptsLook for applications or examples of your own.

Detailed, technical materialSince it includes complicated directions, statements of dif cult

principles, technical information be patient and approach the

text critically.

Material on which you want

detailed retention

Since you want to remember them for a longer duration, read such

a material with intensity, observation, and painstaking ef ort.

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17.10 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE READING

Following are some important tips you must keep in mind about reading:

1. Get your eyes checked. Often, very slow reading is related to uncorrected eye defects.

Before embarking on speed reading, make sure that you don’t have any correctable eye

defects.

2. Get rid of the habit of vocalizing words—if you have—as you read. If you sound out words

in your throat or whisper them, your reading rate is slowed considerably. You should be able

to read most material at least two or three times faster when reading silently than orally.

3. Find out what you want to know, and for that you need to cut through and assess what is to

be skipped from reading.

4. Your reading rate should vary according to your reading purpose. To understand the infor-

mation, for example, skim or scan at a rapid rate.

5. It is always important to stress on qualitative not quantitative reading.

6. Cultivate a positive attitude towards reading. The more you read the more love you develop

towards reading.

7. Even if you ﬁ nd reading to be tedious, try to give your task an extended stretch of an hour

or so. Don’t give up reading in the ﬁ rst 10–15 minutes itself.

8. Learn to underline the key parts/words/concepts for further references.

9. While reading, new ideas and concepts will ﬂ ash in the mind and the same may be added in

the margin of the page.

10. By using different coloured pencils, the importance level of the contents can be underlined

for future reading.

11. Try to convert the written information into pictorial format while reading for effective com-

prehension of contents.

12. Fix some amount of time daily, exclusively for reading, and over a period of time it will

become a practice.

Accelerate your pace when you come across certain difﬁ culties, as given in Table 17.4 .

Table 17.4 Dif erent Suggested Approaches to Reading (By Accelerating your Pace)

Type of Dif cultySuggested Approach

Simple material with few ideas which are

new to you

Move rapidly over the familiar ones;

spend most of your time on the unfamiliar

ideas.

Unnecessary examples and illustrationsSince these are included to clarify ideas,

move over them rapidly when they are

not needed.

Detailed explanation and idea elaboration

which you do not need

Since you do not need them, you can

move rapidly over them.

Broad, generalized ideas, and ideas which

are restatements of previous ones

These can be readily grasped, even with

scan techniques.

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RECAPITULATION

There are four skills that are essential for all, namely

speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills.

However, reading helps you increase your compe-

tence in other language skills as well.

Reading speed can be increased up to 1000 words

per minute by following certain tips given in the

chapter.

For developing ef ective reading, you need to have

the desire to improve, to make conscious ef orts to

use new techniques and also to have motivation to

practise.

Word-by-word reading, slow eye movement, complex

words in the text, and lack of concentration are the

major hurdles in ef ective reading.

Reading helps in building conf dence besides giv-

ing you pleasure and relaxation, as you start reading

extended or longer texts.

Vocalization, word-by-word reading, speed read-

ing, SQ3R, SPE, and multiple intelligences-based

method are various methods that people use while

reading, but you should select the suitable method

of reading dif erent types of texts.

As a good reader, you should eff ectively use skim

ming, scanning, extensive, and intensive reading skills.

You know Wisey,

yesterday Sam said that

my ideas are farcical.

What does that

mean?

Farcical means

ridiculous or absurd.

Why did he say

that?

I told him I

want to grow more

trees near my house

to compensate for all

the fallen trees.

I don't think that

is farcical at all. But

the way you articulated

your idea was

incorrect.

Why? What is

wrong with what

I said?

You should have said,

'I want to plant more

trees to compensate for

all the trees felled.’

WISEWELL QUIPS

EXERCISES

Concept Review Questions

1. Do you believe in what Francis Bacon has said— Read-

ing maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and

writing an exact man? Elaborate in 250 words on how

important reading is for a professional.

2. What do you mean by ef ective reading skills?

Discuss the major benefi ts of artful reading?

3. What is the role of speed in the reading process?

Discuss the kind of relation that can be observed

between speed and understanding.

4. It is said that reading enhances your general abil-

ity to use other language skills such as listening,

speaking, and writing. Do you agree with the state-

ment? Highlight the importance of reading in about

200 words.

5. Discuss the four basic steps to ef ective reading.

Also suggest ways to increase the speed of reading.

6. What are the major dif erences between ef cient

readers and inef cient readers? Discuss and

substantiate.

7. Most adults are able to increase their reading rate

signif cantly and rather rapidly without lowering

their comprehension. Do you subscribe to the view?

Mention the three major factors which are essential

for increasing your speed of reading.

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8. ‘Everybody knows how to read. But not everybody

knows how to read skilfully and artfully.’ Illustrate

the statement and point out the major hurdles in

ef ective reading.

9. What are the major faulty reading habits? Discuss

them in detail.

10. Explain the following in about 150 words each:

(a) Vocalization in reading (b) Regression

(c) Faulty eye movement (d) SQ3R

11. Discuss in detail the various methods of reading

that are employed by readers.

12. Discuss the dif erent types of reading skills that you

need to master for reading dif erent types of texts.

13. When should you increase and decrease your speed

of reading in order to develop ef ective reading?

Discuss in detail.

14. Discuss the various tips for inculcating good reading

skills.