Eliminate bad reading habits to improve speed & comprehension

Listed below are a variety of bad reading habits and solutions to these problems that you should consider if you are aiming to improve your reading performance and accuracy.

5 Bad Reading Habits and How to Fix Them

1. Reading one word at a time: Most people are actually incredibly capable readers and can read at a good pace just from the techniques they first learnt when they were a child. Using your index finger to pace beneath each line is one method you might still apply every now and then. However, as we are required to become more and more specific with our information people start to read much slower, focusing specifically on one word at a time as they believe this will improve their comprehension rates. Interestingly, the brain is more than capable of processing short phrases and groups of words incredibly quickly! When you consider that on average, half of your reading material consists of the most common 100 words in the English language this lessens the need for slow reading even further! The solution? Quite simply, next time you are reading a technical text try reading it a little quicker and try reading groups of words as opposed to individual words. This will reinforce faster reading and train your eyes and mind to work in harmony to capture key information! However, it may take some time and practice to fully master this technique.

2. Reading everything at the same speed: This may initially sound a little odd. Surely reading the same speed is beneficial? Not exactly. Text you find incredibly easy to comprehend is not worth wasting excess time over, especially if it is information you already know. Likewise, for trickier sections, slowing down a little means you will not have to re-read the text later, which is another time wasting bad reading habit many use.

Solution: Try slowing down for tricky sections and speeding up for easy ones the next time you read. You will be surprised at just how much more information will sink in! Furthermore, apply proven methods such as skimming and scanning if you only need an overview of the material.

3. Vocalization and sub-vocalization: What is meant by vocalization? This is when you are reading and start pronouncing words out loud as you read. Sub-vocalization is the same idea but pronouncing words in your head. These are techniques that many use as they believe it helps their memory retention if they hear information as well as read it. In reality, it is slowing your reading down considerably.

The fix? Stop doing it by focusing upon groups of words instead of individual ones! It can take time to stop doing this “bad reading habit” and actively thinking about not vocalizing the text can reduce your focus on your reading material. Within a short space of time however, you should find the process much easier which will only help your reading abilities considerably. A proven trick is to hum a melody while flying over the words. It works for me. You may also learn to how to visualize what you read in order to overcome sub-vocalization.

4. Regression- Skipping back and general re-reading: Having to repeat yourself when speaking is frustrating and it is the same case when reading. Often, even if you have fully understood the sentence you will find yourself getting to the end of a page and rereading it out of habit, which is a huge waste of time. This is called regression.

The solution here is somewhat simple. Do not reread sections of text unless you failed to comprehend any of it. This point will be further discussed later, but by reading text just the once it reduces your tendency to do this habit. And if you require further reading? Try another text on the same subject. This will improve your perspective of the subject and will more than likely throw up additional interesting information!

5. Information overloading and lack of preparation: Leaving things to the last minute is never ideal and with reading this is no different. Often when reading is left last minute, you find yourself trying to cram as much information as possible into your brain. Even when not left to the last minute, this is something many people do anyway. This can lead to misinformation and improper communication between the text and you, meaning that what you read and what you actually comprehend can vary drastically.

Solution: A good technique to start using is pre-reading preparation, especially if you can undertake it a day or so before. Briefly skim text and the internet for key points on the topic and you will be surprised at just how much information you can gather. If this initial information is reinforced by your reading? Then that is great! And if not, then simply read another piece of text again to gain another perspective and do not become stressed.

Other Key Issues Affecting Your Reading

1. Poor choice of reading environment: This is of particular importance if you are reading from a screen. Poorly lit and noisy environments are everywhere, even in the workplace and it is surprising just how many people choose to read in them.

Tip: Next time you decide to sit down with reading material, ensure that the lighting is good and that it is quiet enough for you to really focus. If not, consider somewhere else if you can.

2. Loss of attention and individual issues : Being distracted with all the technological wizardy around you is incredibly easy. All too often a video of a cat will attract your attention and before you know it half an hour has passed whilst you have searched the deep, dark recesses of Youtube. But people also convince themselves that they cannot possibly read any faster than they are already doing so, putting them in a state of semi-denial. Thankfully, this is easy enough to overcome.

How? Next time you read, try doing so a little quicker. Search and download a speed reading app that will teach you how to read just that little bit faster. Results are often seen within the hour!

And the next time you have some reading to undertake? Simply switch the WiFi on your device off. Place it face down and on silent so you have no idea when you have been text. And reward yourself when your reading is complete or you need a break! After 45 minutes of solid reading, take 15 minutes to refresh. Take a walk, text your friends back, do whatever you enjoy doing. Just have the discipline to stop that activity after the 15 minutes are up.

Bad Reading Habits – Summary

Highlighted above are some of the key bad reading habits and issues that you should be aware of the next time you find yourself frustrated by your reading speed. Remember that preparation is key, distractions are unnecessary and progress comes in small stages, not suddenly all at once. Rome wasn’t built in a day after all! Repeating these techniques as often as you can is also central to making any steps forward, so simply take half an hour out of your day and you will see results in absolutely no time at all!