

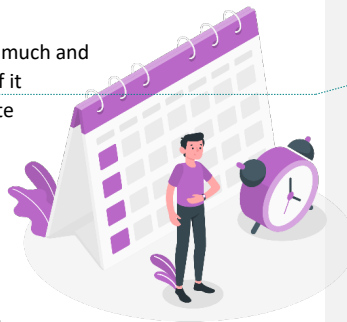
Reading is a huge part of our daily life. We read to gather information, to have fun, to gain understanding, and to communicate. When it comes to your education, it is incredibly important to not only read but to fully digest and comprehend what you have read.

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Unfortunately, there is no shortcut to making reading easier. However, you can do things to make the time you spend reading effective and maybe even a little enjoyable.

Scheduling

Creating a study plan can be an enormous help as you determine how much and how often you need to read. Unfortunately, a study plan is worthless if it isn't realistic. When scheduling the amount of time needed to complete reading assignments, students often underestimate how long it takes them to read a chapter AND comprehend the information within the chapter. There are online programs that help you determine your reading speed and some study centers have reading speed programs that you can use.



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There is also another method you can use to get pretty close to your actual reading speed. While not 100% accurate, it will get you pretty close:

1. Estimate the number of words on a page. To estimate the number of words on a page, count the number of words in two lines and then divide by two. For example, the first paragraph of this section has 34 words in the first two lines. Using this equation, each sentence averages 17 words per line.
2. Next, count the number of lines on one page and multiply words per line. This section has 39 lines on the page, so 39 lines x 17 words per line equals 663 words on a page as your estimate.
3. Using a timer, read the page and identify how long it takes you to read the page. At the end of the page, stop the timer and note how long it took you to read the page, then convert the total time to seconds.
4. Divide the total words per page by the number of seconds it took you to read and then multiply by 60. For example, let's say it took you 2 minutes and 44 seconds to read this page, equaling 164 seconds. The formula is $663/144 \times 60$ for a total of 276. Using these numbers, your average reading speed would be about 276 words per minute.

Commented [KRG1]: It might be more accurate to read the page first, then estimate how many words there are, that you haven't accidentally already read some of it when counting. Might not actually matter, just something that came to my mind.

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At that reading speed, if you schedule one hour to conduct your reading, you will cover about 16,000 words, or approximately 25 pages. Texts that are heavily indented or contain bullet-point lists may skew your estimate in one direction or the other, but your results are accurate enough to schedule your reading. Keep in mind that it may take you longer to read a page if you are tired, the material is complex, or you are distracted. This method is simply a way to give you a good idea of how long it takes you to read to make your study plan.

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Time fluctuations are normal. However, if you consistently find yourself with ten or more minutes left in your scheduled block, recalculate your reading speed. Each time you test your reading speed, use the same material if possible (consistency, as always, is vital). As you apply yourself to your reading, your speed and comprehension will increase.

Commented [KRG2]: Is there also the chance you'd read it faster the second time since you're now familiar with it?

While it may be tempting to read quickly, if you don't understand the material you are reading, there isn't much intrinsic value for your short-term memory or your long-term memory. Therefore, when calculating your reading speed, make sure you also understand what you are reading. You don't have to have an in-depth understanding of the material. Still, you should at least be able to recall what you read—reading 500 words per minute, whether for study or entertainment, means nothing if you cannot remember and use the information. If you can increase your reading speed, that is wonderful, but don't sacrifice your ability to engage your critical thinking skills.

There are different reading techniques to use that assist you during your reading tasks. You always want to read with purpose, but using other methods throughout your reading will help you use your time effectively and efficiently.

Skimming



Skimming is a disciplined reading method where the goal is to quickly get a general impression of the text's main point(s). Skimming is helpful with time management—you review the table of contents, chapter headings, and subheadings for important content and **narrow your focus** from there. There are three types of skimming: preview, overview, and review.

Preview skimming is used to learn about the ideas presented and their structure. Readers often use preview skimming when choosing a book, looking at a chapter before reading, or searching for source material to use for research. This method can help you prepare and set a purpose

for your task by identifying the type of information provided within the text, like data and tables or abstract concepts. Previewing also aids in identifying the sections you should read in more detail and the sections you can omit.

When using the preview skimming method, **read the first paragraph and the headings and first sentences of the following paragraphs and sections.** Pay attention to titles and categories in bold or italic print. Preview skimming can direct your reading by quickly identifying known and unknown content.

Overview skimming is a more thorough skimming technique and is used to focus on in-depth reading at a later time. When using the overview skimming method, read the first paragraph, headings, and the first sentence of each paragraph. While you are skimming, note the structure and material content by paying attention to patterns, transitions, and clue words. Identify text indicating topic tangents, extraneous remarks, and other information that may be irrelevant to the main subject. Phrases that include *I would argue* or *As a side note* indicate sidebar conversations or supplemental information that can be postponed for later reading or ignored altogether.

Review skimming is used to review material that you have already covered. It is an effective tool to prepare for exams and presentations. Because you have **already** spent time in the material, review skimming allows you to move through ideas and concepts **quickly**, stopping to note significant details or order of events. With review skimming, you review each chapter and its sub-chapters, stopping on what you identified earlier in your study.

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Skimming basics remain the same regardless if you are using it as a preview, overview, or review. While you are skimming, note where the author adds bold print and graphics to indicate importance. Start at the beginning of the text and move your eyes over the body of the information quickly, capturing chapter titles, subtitles, and the first and last sentence of each paragraph. As you gather information, your skimming can help focus your study by eliminating extraneous information.

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Skimming is an effective tool that can reduce your reading load, but there are some instances when skimming the material is not as helpful. Fiction, essays, poetry, short stories, and texts without summaries or chapter headings are not conducive to skimming. Non-fiction texts (like textbooks), journal articles, and essays have features that make skimming easy and productive—summaries, abstracts, pictures, diagrams, and bold words.

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Use skimming when researching to identify articles and information relevant to your topic quickly. By skimming the table of contents, reading the abstract, and reviewing the paragraph headers, you can quickly identify the content's use.

You can also use skimming to study for an exam—you have covered the information in-depth, now it's time to solidify that information in your brain. Review each paragraph heading or chapter heading and go over in your mind the main concepts and ideas covered in that paragraph. If the information is firm in hand, move on to the next heading until your review of the material is complete.

While useful, skimming can present its problems, too. If you are struggling to understand the content, an in-depth review is better. If you know the exam might focus on tiny details of a subject, you'll want to be sure not skip over them.

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As with any tool, skimming should be used only if it is appropriate to the task at hand. Before skimming, think about the test and what you know about the subject. Know when you can skim and when you should spend more time on the subject. Skimming will help you grasp the general idea, "the bones," if you will. Further investigation will help you put meat on those bones.

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Now, let's talk about highlighting.

Highlighting

There's nothing like a highlighter to say, "I'm a serious student!" But that highlighter can cause more damage than good. You may have heard that the pen is mightier than the sword. Well, the pen has nothing on the highlighter. Used correctly, a highlighter can transform your note-taking. Misused, a highlighter can waste your time and lure you into a false sense of confidence.



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People develop complicated highlighter codes for their studies, getting to the point where the code takes more time to maintain than just reading. The most effective use of a highlighter comes in the simplest form: used sparingly, and with intention.

Let's take a look at the dos and don'ts of highlighter use.

Don't use the highlighter on your first pass of reading. Before you can highlight the essential points, you have to know what those essential parts are. Breaking the highlighter out on your first pass means that everything has the potential to be highlighted. Before you know it, entire paragraphs are blaring out from the page in iridescent yellow, blue, or pink. Using your highlighter on your first pass means that you run the risk of highlighting everything, regardless of relevance.

Do read the text first. Think about the content of the information and the main points the author is trying to convey. After you have digested the reading, go back a second time with your highlighter. Highlight important ideas, key vocabulary, and connecting thoughts.

If it works for you, use one color for vocabulary and another for concepts. Whatever system you use, make sure it is not complicated. If you need a legend or code-key to decipher your highlighting, it is not an effective system, and you will spend more time figuring out why something is highlighted than learning the information.

Don't stop taking notes. Highlighting is used to enhance, not replace, your notes. While it may seem that it is easier to highlight important information, nothing can take the place of writing the information in your own words. It is proven that writing something in your own words is essential to processing and understanding information.

Writing information in your words aids in connecting the information in your brain and is an active process. Highlighting is passive—you are noting the information, but the connection that is made is minimal.

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Do use a highlighter to identify important ideas and concepts in a text. Use a highlighter to identify key points in your notes and to identify key concepts in a text that you may use multiple times.

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A highlighter should not be your first or last method to study material. When used correctly, highlighting helps you pick out the important parts of the text and mark that information for review later. Using a highlighter with other methods of studying—reading, skimming, and note-taking—will round out your study session and assist you in making the most of your time.

Let's sum everything up.

- Knowing how fast you read aids in scheduling your study time. Always add a little cushion to the amount of time you allow yourself but don't add so much time that you are easily distracted.
- Skimming is a valuable tool to direct your study efforts. Use skimming techniques before, during, and after to eliminate unnecessary focus on irrelevant information.
- And finally, using a highlighter while implementing other study techniques can create connections in your brain to make the recall of information more accessible and to help you understand concepts deeper.

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Like anything worthwhile, studying takes practice. It takes time and effort to implement new systems and see if they work for you. The point is that you try, adapt an existing technique in a way that works for you, and apply yourself to continual improvement and dedication.

As you practice your study techniques, you will find that they come more naturally as time goes on, making you an efficient and effective learner, ready to crush any test that comes your way.

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