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THE IMPORTANCE OF READING FASTER

One of the most important functions of the teacher is to provide 'sales talk' for reading improvement. 'You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.' Students are often at school because the law requires it or because they are working for a certificate or diploma. They must be made to realize the importance of reading improvement.

If the students do not co-operate with the course, try to improve, and do their homework diligently, their reading will not improve. So the teacher must get them on his side and working to improve themselves. This should be fairly easy: one can point out to them that much of their homework consists of reading; that if they go further in their education much reading will be required of them; and that as adults they will probably do much reading, both for business and pleasure, of newspapers, magazines, books and directions. One can suggest the extent to which modern society depends on the ability to communicate through reading: every government official, business man and housewife must read and does read. One might give some examples from the students' own community.

Writing is used as a means of communication, because with it one man can share his knowledge with millions. Furthermore, it is fairly cheap, since modern printing-presses can make all types of material available at a fairly low cost. From the reader's standpoint, reading should be one of the fastest

methods of receiving information. English is usually spoken at about 150 words per minute, while an average person in England or the United States can read at 250 words per minute or faster. So we see that an average person can read nearly twice as fast as he can listen. Speakers of English as a second language can easily learn to read at that speed, or even faster.

	1st week		7th week		Gain	
	Speed (w.p.m.)	Compre- hension (%)	Speed (w.p.m.)	Compre- hension (%)	Speed (w.p.m.)	Compre- hension (%)
B.A. Science	171	56	385	77	214	21
B.A. Arts	220	65	370	72	150	7
Mixed B.A. and sixth form	201	63	395	75	194	12
Sixth form	154	40	381	70	227	10

Table 1. Reading-speed and comprehension improvement of four classes at Makerere University College after 7 weeks of instruction. (Classes were approximately 85 % African students and 15 % Asian. Sixth-form classes are students about 18 years old in a senior secondary school who are preparing for the university in one or two years.)

These reading-improvement scores are based on exercises found in the *Drill Book* and given under classroom conditions. There is some evidence that students, when relaxing at home, do not read as rapidly as they do in class under test conditions but there is also evidence that a good deal of the reading improvement shown in class tests transfers to other types of reading, such as that done for recreation or study.

Even if these improvement figures seem ambitiously high, the teacher might suggest that students could at any rate improve their reading by 25 %. This would mean that in the time normally taken to read four books they could now read five. In the course of a lifetime this could mean important time-saving

or increased reading. Doing a few arithmetic problems on the board with the students' own estimate of the amount of time they spend reading per week will be quite convincing.

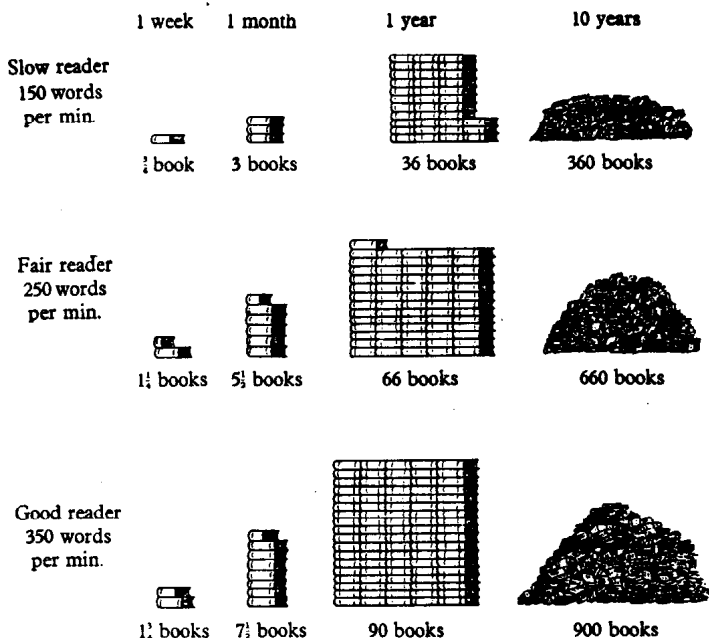


Fig. 1. Sample arithmetic problems showing benefits of increased speed. (These problems assume that the student reads 1 hour per day, 6 days per week; and that the books read are of an average length of 70,000 words.)

Some students may feel that fast readers do not understand as much as slow readers. This fallacy can easily be disproved when you give the first reading test in class. A quick glance at the scores will show that fast readers sometimes have very good comprehension and sometimes poor comprehension. Some slow readers will have good comprehension and others poor comprehension. In short, there is little relationship between

reading speed and comprehension. This statement needs to be made with caution because sometimes when a slow reader suddenly improves his reading speed it will *temporarily* lower his comprehension (this will be discussed in later chapters). But the essential point for the class to grasp is that fast readers can certainly comprehend as much as, or more than, slow readers.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTED LECTURE OUTLINE

WEEK I, SESSION I

1. The importance of reading in school, for pleasure, or for business.
2. Give local examples.
3. Reading is the fastest form of communication—twice as fast as listening.
4. Reading courses can often double speed without losing comprehension.
5. The teacher may work arithmetic problems on the board using students' estimate of the time spent reading per week, year, etc., using speed increases of 25, 50, 100%.
6. The teacher may also wish to discuss the course with the class (see Introduction summary, p. xii).

INITIAL READING TEST

For the good of the student, the teacher and the administration it is as well to begin the course with as accurate a reading test as possible. Since the object of the course is to show some improvement in reading speed and sometimes in comprehension as well, it is necessary to have some measure of the students' reading speed and comprehension at the beginning of the course. This can be obtained by using the first exercise

in the *Drill Book* or a standardized reading test which measures reading speed and comprehension from any other source. If some test other than the first drill passage is used care must be taken in selecting it so that it will be at the correct level of difficulty.

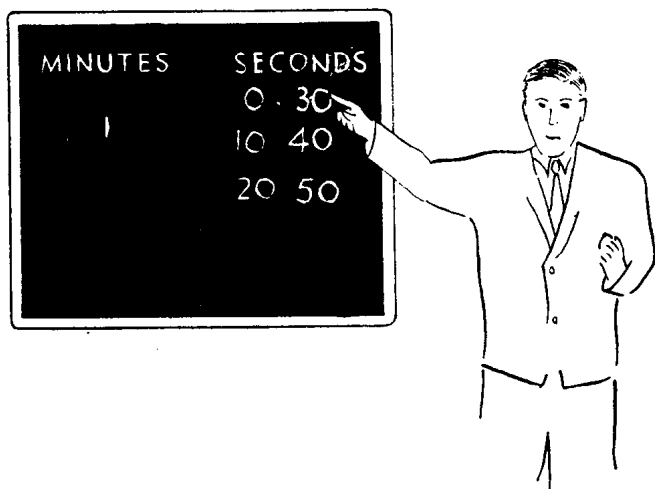


Fig. 2. Method of showing students their reading time.

If the first drill passage is being used as the first reading test, explain to the students that this is to be a test of both reading speed and comprehension. They are to read the passage as rapidly as possible, and to note down the time taken either in the *Drill Book* itself or on a separate sheet of paper.

Timing of the reading test requires a little careful attention from the teacher, but is not difficult. The first requirement is a watch which has a second hand. On the blackboard the teacher then writes the word 'minutes' and the word 'seconds'. Underneath the word 'seconds' he should write a column of numbers: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50. The teacher then starts the class

all at once, saying 'ready—go'. At the same time he glances at his watch and after one minute has passed he writes '1' on the board underneath the word 'minutes'. He then immediately places his finger alongside the zero under the seconds column. Keeping his eye on the watch, he moves his finger down to 10 when 10 more seconds have passed, to 20 when 20 seconds have passed, and so on. When two minutes have passed he quickly erases the '1' under the minute column and writes '2', then continues the same procedure, pointing his finger to the correct number of seconds.

As each student finishes reading his passage he glances up at the board, notes the time that the teacher is indicating, and writes it down in the *Drill Book* or on a separate sheet of paper. It is important that each student should record this time accurately, as it is used to determine his reading speed in words per minute. The teacher should explain carefully how the student is to begin reading when the teacher says 'go' and to look up as soon as he is finished and record the time accurately.

Students should then turn the page and answer the ten multiple-choice questions without looking back at the passage. They should write 'a', 'b', 'c' or 'd', according to their choice of answer either in the *Drill Book* or on a separate sheet of paper. The comprehension questions are not timed, but if one or two of the class continue working long after most have finished a halt should be called, so as not to waste too much time. Extreme slowness is often a measure of poor comprehension and should be penalized a little anyway.

The teacher should not give out the *Drill Book* to the students until he is ready to give the reading test. This will keep the class from looking through the book and becoming familiar with the test material. After the books have been given out the teacher should tell the students not to read on beyond the passage which is set. The teacher should decide whether the

books are to be written in or not. It is easier and neater to let the readers do all the work in the *Drill Book*, but sometimes for the sake of economy and re-use of the *Drill Book* the teacher may tell the students to do all writing on a separate sheet of paper or in a separate notebook.

The comprehension test is often scored by letting the students exchange papers or books and correct each other's work while the teacher slowly reads out the correct answers. But on a first reading test it is perhaps better for the teacher to correct the comprehension test himself so that there will be less chance of error. A normal comprehension score is 70% (7 out of 10 correct). More discussion of normal comprehension will be given in a later chapter.

A reading score in words per minute can be obtained from entering the table at the end of the *Drill Book*. This table gives the reading rate in words per minute, for every ten- or fifteen-second interval, for articles of various lengths. Each timed passage in the *Drill Book* has the approximate number of words in it at the bottom of the page on which it is printed. The first article, for example, contains 525 words; if a student reads that passage in 3 minutes 15 seconds his reading speed would be 162 words per minute. The paragraph below the table also gives directions for determining the words per minute in other ways, though usually use of the table is the easiest.

The teacher should make a chart listing all the students names down the left-hand side. In the first column after the names, the teacher should put the results of the initial test. The reading speed in words per minute should be placed first followed by an oblique stroke and the reading comprehension score as a percentage. Each week, as the students take their test in class, the teacher adds each student's speed and comprehension score to the chart. This chart is an easy way to follow each student's progress as well as a record for the class as a

Time (min. sec.)		Length of article in words									
		425	450	475	500	525	550	575	600	625	
0	50	511	540	569	600	638	657	686	720	748	
1	00	425	450	475	500	525	550	575	600	625	
1	10	365	387	407	427	450	471	493	515	535	
1	20	319	338	356	375	394	412	433	450	469	
1	30	284	300	316	334	350	364	384	400	415	
1	40	256	271	285	300	316	330	345	360	376	
1	50	232	246	260	273	287	300	314	328	342	
2	00	213	225	247	250	262	274	288	300	312	
2	10	196	208	218	231	242	253	265	276	288	
2	20	186	194	204	215	226	236	246	258	268	
2	30	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250	
2	40	159	169	178	188	198	206	216	225	235	
2	50	151	159	166	174	183	192	200	209	218	
3	00	142	150	158	167	175	184	192	200	208	
3	10	134	142	151	158	166	174	182	190	198	
3	20	128	135	143	150	158	165	173	180	188	
3	30	122	128	136	143	150	157	165	171	179	
3	40	116	123	130	137	143	150	157	164	171	
3	50	111	117	124	131	137	144	150	157	163	
4	00	106	112	118	125	131	137	144	150	156	
4	10	102	108	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	
4	20	98	104	110	116	122	127	133	139	145	
4	30	94	100	105	111	117	122	128	132	139	
4	40	91	97	102	107	113	118	123	128	134	
4	50	88	93	98	104	109	114	119	124	129	
5	00	85	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125	
5	10	82	87	92	97	102	106	111	116	121	
5	20	80	84	89	94	99	104	108	113	117	
5	30	77	82	86	91	95	100	105	109	114	
5	40	75	79	84	87	93	97	102	106	110	
5	50	73	77	82	86	90	94	98	103	107	
6	00	71	75	79	83	87	92	96	100	104	
6	10	69	73	77	81	85	89	93	97	101	
6	20	67	71	75	79	83	87	91	95	99	
6	30	65	69	73	77	81	84	88	92	96	
6	40	63	68	71	75	79	83	86	90	93	
6	50	62	66	70	73	77	81	84	88	91	

Fig. 3. 'Words per minute' chart. (If a student reads a 475-word article in 2 minutes 10 seconds his rate is 218 words per minute.)

whole. Each week the teacher should average the reading speed and comprehension scores so that he has an idea how the class is moving.

Name	1st week test	2nd week test	3rd week test	4th week test	5th week test	6th week test	7th week test
Jones	145/60	175/50	185/70	220/80	250/60	275/70	301/60
Smith	262/90	320/80	380/70	385/80	350/60	425/70	495/70
Mboya	177/80	189/80	225/90	185/90	271/60	302/70	350/90
Class average	174/65	189/68	212/67	249/69	293/68	325/70	360/72

Fig. 4. Sample progress chart to be kept by the reader.

HOMEWORK

Finally homework should be set. If the teacher is following the ten-week-course plan, two exercises will be set each week for homework. The students should be told to pay attention to both reading speed and comprehension while doing the homework. They should also be asked to do it at a favourable time, not when they are too tired or the environment too disturbing. The students should be shown how to correct their own comprehension tests by using the key (answers) at the back of the *Drill Book*, and finally each student should keep a record of the speed and comprehension score for each exercise either in the *Drill Book* or in a separate notebook.

One small problem that may arise in giving a reading test or exercise is that some students start to read the test passage before the teacher says 'go'. This can be eliminated by telling all the students to 'look up' at the teacher as soon as they have found the proper page and are ready. The teacher explains that the test cannot begin until all students show that they are ready to begin by 'looking up' at the teacher.

If the question of cheating comes up, tell the student that

the cheater only cheats himself. If he does not wish to do the work honestly and improve his reading; that is his business. The teacher should encourage the students but marks or punishments should not be given. The gain the student makes in improving his reading should be its own reward. A student who does not make a satisfactory gain in reading or comprehension should not be punished, as he may be working near the limits of his ability. But most students are not usually working to their limits.

In doing homework exercises the student will need a watch with a second-hand. The student can write down the starting time in minutes and seconds (often it is easier to start when the second-hand is at 0). Then he can write down his finishing time in minutes and seconds. The difference between the two will be his reading time. He then uses the chart at the back of the *Drill Book* to determine his words per minute score. Usually entering in the chart the time to the nearest ten seconds is accurate enough for drill purposes.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTED COURSE WORK

WEEK 1, SESSION 2

Directions for reading test

1. Explain that it is a test of reading speed and comprehension. The class should read as rapidly as is consistent with comprehension, for they must answer the questions without looking back.
2. Explain the method of timing. Demonstrate.
3. Tell the students exactly where to record time and answers to comprehension questions (either in the *Drill Book* or on separate paper).

4. The comprehension questions are not timed, but a total time limit may be imposed on a few stragglers.

5. Correct the reading test and record the answers on class progress sheet.

Homework

1. If the teacher is following a ten-week course and using the *Faster Reading Drill Book*, he should set two passages to be done for the week's homework.

2. This homework should be done at a favourable time and scored by the student.

2

COMMON FAULTS AND EYE MOVEMENTS

There are a number of bad habits which poor readers adopt. Most of these involve using extra body movement in the reading process. In efficient reading, the muscles of the eye should make the only external movement. Of course there must be vigorous mental activity, but extra body movements, such as pointing with the finger or moving the lips, do not help reading and often slow it down.

POINTING AT WORDS

A fault that is often seen when students are trying to concentrate is pointing to the words with a finger, pencil or ruler. Young children and very poor readers often point with a finger at each word in turn. Slightly more mature readers sometimes hold a pencil or ruler underneath the line which they are reading. While marking the line might be helpful for beginning readers, it is certainly unnecessary for normal readers. Besides slowing down the student through the mere mechanical movement of pencil, ruler, or finger, pointing at lines or words tends to cause the student to focus his attention on the wrong thing. The important thing to concentrate on while reading is the idea that the author is trying to communicate, and not the location of the words on the page. The eyes of any child old enough to learn how to read are certainly skilful enough to be able to follow a line of print without extra help from fingers or rulers.

HEAD MOVEMENT

Another common fault that the teacher will be able readily to observe is head movement. This most often occurs when students are nervous about their reading or trying hard, as during a reading speed test. With head movement the student tries to aim his nose at the word he is reading so that as he reads across the line his head turns slightly. When he makes the return sweep to begin a new line his head quickly turns back so that his nose is pointed at the left-hand margin, and he can now begin to read the new line by slowly turning his head. The belief that this head movement aids reading is pure nonsense. Eye muscles are quite capable of shifting the eyes from word to word, and they need no help from neck muscles. I sometimes tease my students by asking them if they have 'radar' in their noses, or if neck muscles are involved in reading comprehension.

Often students are quite unaware that they are moving their heads while reading. The teacher should observe his students while reading drill is in progress, and if he sees a student moving his head while reading he should immediately remind him not to do it.

VOCALIZATION

Vocalization is another fault. Some poor readers think it necessary to pronounce aloud each word as it is read. Usually this pronunciation is quite soft, so that the student is more whispering to himself than actually reading aloud, but even this is very undesirable. The chief disadvantage of pronouncing words while you read them is that it tends to tie reading speed to speaking speed, and as I have already said, the silent reading of most normal readers is nearly twice as fast as their speaking. Usually this fault can be eliminated in older students by their own conscious effort, possibly with the aid of a few reminders from the teacher. Vocalization by beginning readers is a

common fault; after a reader reaches some maturity it becomes very undesirable.

Vocalization takes various modified forms. Sometimes a reader will merely move his lips soundlessly. At other times he may make tongue or throat movements without lip movement. Still other readers will have activity going on in their vocal cords, which can be detected by the student if he places his fingers alongside his larynx (vocal cords in the throat) while he is reading. Vocal cord vibration can be felt with the fingers quite easily. You might demonstrate this to your students by getting them to hold their throats while they hum softly. Like true vocalization, these minor parts of 'subvocalization'—lip movement, tongue or throat movement and vocal cord movement—can be stopped by conscious effort on the part of the student. The teacher can often observe lip movement and should remind the student not to do it. Excessively slow reading speeds are often a clue to some type of vocalization.

SUBVOCALIZATION

Finally we come to the most difficult of all types of vocalization. This is subvocalization. In subvocalization there is no body movement. The lips, tongue or vocal cords do not move. But an inner type of speech persists: within the student's mind he is saying each word to himself, clearly pronouncing each word and then listening to himself, as it were. This fault is difficult, but not impossible, to cure.

Probably the main reason for subvocalization is the nature of written language. English is written in an alphabet: a set of symbols which stand for speech-sounds. The speech-sounds in turn stand for an idea or thought. Since most students learn to read either after learning to speak or at the same time, there is a natural tendency to relate the printed word to its speech-sound. But it is not necessary to say or hear the word in order to get its meaning. It is quite possible to look at the

printed word and get the idea directly. This is what efficient readers do.

The fault of subvocalization is often contributed to by teachers who equate all reading lessons with reading aloud. It is true that an important part of reading instruction lies in asking the students to read aloud. But this must not be the only type of reading instruction. In fact students should be given much practice in reading silently, because unless they are to be radio announcers, or follow some similar profession, most of the reading they will do in their lives will be silent reading. Some teachers make the situation worse by correcting the student's oral reading so that he is not allowed to leave out a single syllable. The student may read a sentence and obviously gets the sense of it, but the teacher will make him go back and re-read it because he left out one 'the'. Accurate oral reading is a desirable dramatic skill, but it has little relationship to silent reading. Many adults with good education can read novels and text-books and understand them well, yet if asked to read aloud would make a poor showing. An important part of this reading-improvement course should be to divorce oral reading skills from silent reading skills. In this course we are interested in making the student able to grasp quickly the ideas presented on a printed page, and not in making him able to entertain the class or please the teacher by reading aloud without error.

Curing subvocalization

The curing of subvocalization often takes a subtle and roundabout route. First, explain to the class that the real purpose of reading is to understand what the author is saying. Then tell them it is quite possible to do this without pronouncing each word. In fact it is undesirable to pronounce each word because of the time it wastes. It is quite easy to show that many people can read much faster than they could

possibly speak; and if this is the second time you have conducted this course in your school you will be able to cite a number of students who can do this. So the first thing that the student needs to realize is that subvocalization is bad.

A direct attack on subvocalization is not always successful. Sometimes when students first become aware of the fact that they are subvocalizing (and this is true in most cases of people reading at speeds of less than 250 words a minute) they try to stop subvocalizing by sheer will-power. They simply say to themselves 'I will not subvocalize'. Often when the student does this he will stop understanding, whereas before, when he was subvocalizing and saying each word inwardly to himself, he was at least taking in the story. Now when he tries by will-power to shut off all subvocalization he may not understand a thing. His eyes may go across the print while nothing happens. As one student expressed it to me, 'the silence was killing me'. If this happens the student should be told to concentrate on the other aspects of reading, namely speed and comprehension. If he must talk to himself while reading let him say, 'What does this mean?', 'I don't believe this', 'This point is not related to the paragraph', or 'I'll bet this will be a question on the comprehension test'. In short, he should talk *about* the material but not repeat the words. He should be mentally engaging in a conversation with the author, but not merely parroting what the author says. Efficient reading requires an active mind, not the mere passivity of saying the author's words.

At the same time that the reader is urgently trying to understand what the author is saying, and testing out the author's ideas against his own background of knowledge, he should be trying to speed up the reading process. He should keep in the back of his mind that one of the purposes of this drill is to get him to read faster, and he should attempt in each exercise to read a little faster than he did in the preceding one. If he is actively and forcefully trying to comprehend the subject-