



Reading Drills

for Speed and
Comprehension

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Comprehension

Second Edition

Edward B. Fry, Ph.D.
Director, Reading Center
Rutgers University



Jamestown Publishers
Providence, Rhode Island

**READING DRILLS
FOR SPEED AND COMPREHENSION**

Catalog No. 751

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Cover Design by Stephen R. Anthony

Text Design and Illustrations
by Mary M. Macdonald

Printed in the United States on Recycled Paper

79 80 81 82 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-89061-039-8

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Foreword

I am most pleased by the wide reception this drill book has had in many colleges and some secondary schools. Apparently, improving reading skills is a subject that is becoming more accepted at the upper levels of education.

Curiously enough, reading is widely taught in the elementary schools and in adult and business management schools. The secondary schools and colleges chose to ignore reading skills improvement until recently. It seemed to be proper to improve students' speaking skills or writing skills, but reading skills were presumed to be completed by the end of the elementary years. Reading specialists have long known that this was not true, but it apparently took expensive, adult reading speed courses to remind secondary and college educators that much could be done for older students.

Much credit is due to Professor Frederick L. Westover of the University of Alabama for helping us take out many of the errors that somehow crept into the first edition. His influence on the new graphs that appear in this edition is also gratefully acknowledged. By diligently preparing for his own reading improvement classes, he has helped many others. May that serve as a model for all of us.

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How To Use This Book

1. Have the students time themselves while reading a passage. On an individual basis this can best be done using a stop watch but on a group basis the teacher can write down the elapsed time every 10 seconds on the chalkboard using any watch with a second hand as a timer. The students should *write down the time* it took them to read the passage as soon as they have completed reading it.

2. Have the students answer the comprehension drills without looking back at the passage. The student would normally do all the drills but if time is short just the multiple choice questions may be done.

3. Score the drill passages and enter both comprehension and rate scores on the graphs at the end of the book.

4. Interpretation of progress is important. The introduction gives many suggestions. Comprehension is generally of five types:

- a. The first five multiple choice questions tend to be of a *factual nature*.

- b. The second five multiple choice tend to be of a *subjective nature*.
- c. The first cloze passage has *subject matter* word deletions and tends to show if the student has understood the content of this particular segment.
- d. The second cloze passage has *structure word* deletions and tends to show the student's familiarity and skills with the syntax of English. These passages tend to be easy for native speakers of English who are good readers but particularly valuable for remedial, bilingual or English-as-a-second-language students.
- e. The ten vocabulary in context items give the student an opportunity to develop his ability to use the context (the surrounding words) as an aid to word recognition. The meaning of a word may change, depending on how it is used. Understanding the context helps the student understand the word.

5. Encouragement is important. Students need both the discipline of regular assignments and class drill time and the encouragement of both self progress and teacher praise. Depending on the particular student's needs, he

should be encouraged to read a little faster or to improve comprehension. Generally, students who tend to score below 70% on the multiple choice drill should stress comprehension and students who regularly score 90% or 100% should be urged to speed up. Look at each student's scores and/or graph each day. Most do-it-yourself or home-improvement-only type reading courses fail because of lack of teacher encouragement, stimulation and discipline.

6. Assignments. There are 30 passages in the book, each followed by multiple choice, cloze comprehension and vocabulary drills. The teacher may use these in any way he or she wishes. Some teachers would use a passage three times a week in class for ten weeks. Others would have only one in-class drill a week and two homework drills per week. Some

would complete the book in five weeks and some would stretch it out over a semester. Personally, I like ten weeks but I'm only one teacher.

The drills may be used in an untimed fashion if the teacher is interested in just comprehension improvement.

The drills also may be used in a variety of situations to stimulate discussion of comprehension or even for oral reading. Good class discussions can be obtained by having students "prove" that their answer is right by finding the part of the passage that backs up their point. It is good that the students sometimes disagree with the author; it teaches them that books aren't infallible.

The drill pages are perforated so that they can be torn out and turned in if the teacher wishes. Also the answer key pages can be easily removed if that is desired.

The book is designed to help the student learn to read at the high school level. It contains 30 passages, each followed by multiple choice, cloze comprehension and vocabulary drills. The passages are selected to cover a wide range of subjects and to provide a good foundation for the student's reading. The book is designed to be used in a variety of ways. It can be used as a textbook, a workbook, or a drill book. The teacher may use the passages in any way he or she wishes. Some teachers would use a passage three times a week in class for ten weeks. Others would have only one in-class drill a week and two homework drills per week. Some would complete the book in five weeks and some would stretch it out over a semester. Personally, I like ten weeks but I'm only one teacher.

Readability of the Passages

The 30 reading passages have been graded for readability and arranged in the following order: the first passage is a short story, the second is a narrative, the third is a descriptive, the fourth is a persuasive, the fifth is a factual, the sixth is a narrative, the seventh is a descriptive, the eighth is a persuasive, the ninth is a factual, the tenth is a narrative, the eleventh is a descriptive, the twelfth is a persuasive, the thirteenth is a factual, the fourteenth is a narrative, the fifteenth is a descriptive, the sixteenth is a persuasive, the seventeenth is a factual, the eighteenth is a narrative, the nineteenth is a descriptive, the twentieth is a persuasive, the twenty-first is a factual, the twenty-second is a narrative, the twenty-third is a descriptive, the twenty-fourth is a persuasive, the twenty-fifth is a factual, the twenty-sixth is a narrative, the twenty-seventh is a descriptive, the twenty-eighth is a persuasive, the twenty-ninth is a factual, and the thirtieth is a narrative.

Introduction

This book is designed as a drill book to help students at the university or advanced secondary level improve their reading speed and comprehension. It may be used alone or in conjunction with its companion workbook, *Skimming & Scanning* (© 1978, Edward Fry). Combining these two texts creates an effective program for building reading rate and comprehension.

This drill book emphasizes timed reading passages followed by two types of comprehension questions, two types of cloze passages and a vocabulary in context drill. Timed reading is the best known method of improving reading speed. The comprehension drills are a way of continually pointing out to the student that there is no point of reading at any speed if there is no understanding of what is read.

Readability of the Passages

The 30 reading passages have all been graded for readability and arranged in the following order: the first passage, Passage A, for each set is of medium difficulty (reading levels 8 and 9); the second passage, Passage B, is the most difficult (reading level 10); and the third passage of the set is the easiest (reading level 7). Thus, the student has the advantage of reading passages of varying difficulty. However, for measuring growth in reading rate you need passages of equal difficulty. Note that the progress graphs on pages 186 and 187 have columns for each passage in the book. We recommend that the student graph only the first passage in a set, however, or an average of the three passages. The reason that we do not ask the student to put every passage on the graph is that it tends to show a lot of variability, and it is easier to see progress when either the averages or the first passages are used. Another reason is that in some courses only one passage is used in class (usually Passage A) and the other two are used as homework. The reading rate of passages done as homework show a lot of variability due to many factors, from inaccurate timing to disruptive environmental conditions. Reading rate tends to jump around quite a bit anyway from fluctuations in motivation, fatigue, previous knowledge of the subject, and many other factors. Hence, we are suggesting you control at least a few of these causes for fluctuation by consistently using either Passage A or a unit average.

There is no fixed time for completing a unit, but I tend to think of it as a week's work, along with whatever other things that the instructor may decide upon. Ten week periods have often been found to be a satisfactory time period to work on reading rate improvement—short enough to hold interest

and long enough to gain some practice experience and start to establish new habits.

We will discuss fluctuations in rate, but you should be aware that there will be fluctuations in comprehension, also from the same causes. There is a further cause for fluctuations in comprehension, and that is that the questions and cloze passages are really drills, not reliable test instruments. Hence, look upon them as indications of comprehension achievement. Unit averaging (of 3 scores), of course, gives more stable scores, but even working passage-by-passage, the student and instructor will see trends in comprehension ability. Just don't expect the scores to be terribly accurate; after all, their chief purpose is to teach the student the importance of getting comprehension while reading at an improving rate.

One more point, the last passage in the book is also of medium difficulty in case instructors wish to compare beginning and ending rate on passages of the same difficulty level.

Reading Speed Improvement

The improvement of reading speed, at any level, is for the normal or superior student. Students having difficulty in reading should concentrate on comprehension before working to improve speed. This drill book may be used primarily for comprehension improvement, if that is what the teacher wishes to emphasize. (See column two.)

As a rule, the passages in a reading speed improvement book should be relatively easy for the student. He should not have difficulty with the vocabulary or the subject matter. Hence, most of the passages in this book should be fairly easy for advanced secondary or university students. Do not worry about their being too easy; let the students see how fast and efficiently they can read them. One mark of a good reader is that he can speed up and read easy material rapidly, with good comprehension.

Conversely, one mark of a poor reader is that he reads everything at the same speed, usually slow.

Reading speed training can benefit almost everyone. In the United States some of the

most enthusiastic students in reading improvement courses are university graduates who realize how important even a slight improvement in their reading skill can be. I am happy to report that reading rate training is becoming a regular part of many university and secondary school curricula.

Comprehension

There is nothing more important than comprehension in reading. The main purpose in reading is to understand the author's thoughts.

The multiple choice questions that follow each of the selections in this drill book are roughly divided into two types of questions. Usually, the first five questions are matters of fact and the second five questions require a little more thinking than rote recall of facts, such as the ability to find what is meant even though it is not specifically stated or the ability to put several different ideas together to form a new idea. These latter questions might be called subjective because they require some thinking on the part of the reader.

You should look over the mistakes you make on these exercises and if you tend to miss questions more in the first half of the drills rather than the second half, perhaps you are missing too many facts. If, on the other hand, you tend to miss questions in the second half of drills, maybe you are getting facts all right but you are not thinking hard enough about what you are reading so that you can extend or "think about" what you have read.

Very few students can read these passages once and get all of the multiple choice questions correct. Usually a score of about 70 or 80 percent correct is normal. If you get 90 or 100 percent correct, you are probably reading too slowly for the purposes of the exercises in this course and you should speed up. But, if your comprehension score is below 70 percent, this is not good and you should strive to improve it.

One method of improving your comprehension is to go back and study all of the multiple choice questions you missed. The first thing to do is to read the question again very

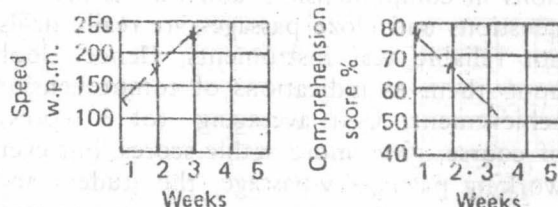
carefully. It is surprising how many students get the wrong answer simply because they have not carefully read the question. After doing this, the student should then look back in the story to see if he can find the part where the question is answered. If the question is from the first half of the drill, that is, an objective or factual question, this should be fairly easy. If on the other hand, the question is from the latter half and requires more thought or inference, the student may have to reread portions of the story which deal with the nature of the question and then think about those portions to see how the correct answer is arrived at. The important work here is for the student to see what a correct answer looks like when it is embedded in the text. Teacher guidance or class discussion is often important in teaching comprehension.

Sometimes the student will disagree with the author's answer to a question. This is natural, particularly in the second half or subjective questions. It is quite possible for errors to creep into a book of this type or even legitimate differences of opinion as to the correct answer. The student should remember that these questions are for purposes of a drill only and that if the questions succeed in focusing the student's attention on the importance of comprehension, then they have succeeded in doing their work.

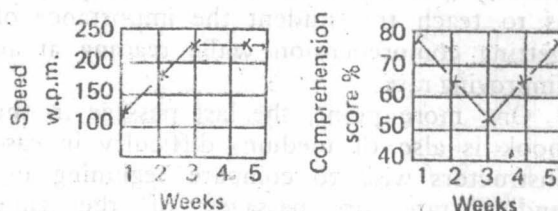
It is important that the comprehension drills be scored immediately after they are taken while the whole subject is fresh in the student's mind. If he is going to study his wrong answers further, it should be done right after the drill rather than at some later time.

It is not unusual for students who have made a rapid increase in speed in the first few weeks of a reading improvement course to have their comprehension gradually or rapidly go down. What should happen in this case is that the student should attempt to level off his speed, *but not lower it*, and concentrate more on comprehension. Usually what will happen if the student levels off his speed and concentrates on comprehension is that the comprehension will gradually rise in a week or two to a normal level of 70 or 80 percent. The *wrong* thing to do is to lower speed. Lowering speed will almost immediately

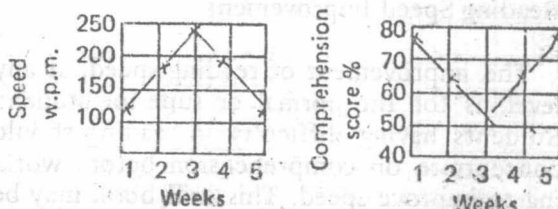
bring up comprehension but the student may be in the awkward position of being right back where he started after several weeks of work. Study carefully the illustration which follows if you have the problem of rising speed and falling comprehension.



The Problem: Student makes rapid speed increase but loses comprehension.



The Correct Solution: Level off speed increase and concentrate on improving comprehension.



The Wrong Solution: It is wrong to lower speed (lose the gain) in order to raise comprehension.

Note: In the wrong solution the student has exactly the same speed and comprehension at the fifth week as he did at the first week; hence no improvement has taken place.

You should be keeping your own speed and comprehension graphs in the back of this drill book. Achieving a proper balance between speed and comprehension is one of the most important things that you will learn in this course. A bad reader is typically one who reads everything at the same speed, usually a slow speed. Another type of bad reader is one who reads so rapidly that he never has any good comprehension. Hence, the important thing for a good reader to achieve is balance between speed and comprehension. And, through training such as

you are getting in this drill book, you should be able to increase your speed while maintaining a normal level of comprehension.

It is not easy to improve your reading skills. Therefore, in taking the drills that follow, you must put forth your full effort to increase your speed and achieve good comprehension.

Cloze Technique

A feature of this drill book is the cloze technique passages following the more traditional multiple choice questions. These passages are a relatively new way of teaching comprehension. Traditional comprehension instruction uses questions to be answered following reading of a passage. The cloze technique, by leaving out words, provides a method of questioning during the reading of a passage. These cloze techniques are of two types:

1. One type of cloze technique has subject matter words omitted in the passages. Subject matter words are the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs which make one passage uniquely different from another. For example, a story of dinosaurs and a story on automobiles would tend to use the same structure words but different subject matter words. The cloze passage with subject matter words omitted is a useful means of measuring the comprehension of all students and teaching comprehension to all students.

2. This type of cloze technique has structure words omitted in passages. Linguists define structure words as those little words such as "the" and "of," which are necessary mechanically for holding the language together, but which contribute little to the unique meaning of a passage. Structure cloze passages are probably most useful for instructing students for whom English is difficult or is a second language.

Psychologically, multiple choice questions are a recognition task, while the cloze technique involves knowledge of English structure and recall. All of these are important parts of reading comprehension, and, as a bonus, they are the type of skills which will help the students do well on many kinds of examinations.

The cloze passages are taken from passages in the article. The student can locate the sentences and correct his own responses or use the key to get the correct answer. One difficulty is that the student may use a synonym or a word which is equally applicable. Research with the cloze technique has shown that, for testing or training, allowing the student to use synonyms is no better than requiring him to supply the author's exact words. For example, in a test situation the same students will come out on top and the same students will come out on the bottom of the class whether exact words are required or synonyms are allowed though, of course, the exact word score will always be a little lower. For our purposes, improvement in comprehension will be reflected from week to week if either exact words or synonym scores are used. Experience has shown that students are a little happier if synonyms are allowed, but the allowance of synonyms presents much more difficulty in correction.

In any event, either or both cloze technique passages are an optional part of the reading improvement course or the use of this drill book.

Vocabulary in Context

Accompanying each selection is a vocabulary in context exercise. These exercises consist of ten words from the selection reprinted in context. Following each word, four meanings are given. The student's task is to select the best meaning for the word as used in this selection.

The precise meaning of a word depends largely on how it is used. As you know, dictionaries often list several meanings for a single word. Only by understanding the context in which a word appears is the reader able to associate the word with an appropriate meaning.

In the vocabulary exercises each word is printed in the sentence or expression from the selection to help the student recall how the word was originally used. Also given is the location of the word in the selection so