Skimming & Scanning

Middle Level

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Foreword

Skimming & Scanning, Middle Level, is designed for students in grades 5 through 8. This drill book of all new material is based on the skills in *Skimming & Scanning, Advanced Level,* for students in secondary schools and colleges. Depending on student ability and the teacher's judgment, the Advanced Level may be suitable for some middle grade students and the Middle Level more appropriate for some secondary grade students.

Some people use the terms *skimming* and *scanning* interchangeably. However, in this book the terms will be used to indicate different types of reading activities.

Skimming means the very rapid reading of an entire selection to get the main ideas and some of the supporting details. Skimming implies an intentionally lowered comprehension so that maximum speed can be obtained.

Scanning, on the other hand, is a locational skill. The reader already knows what to look for; the goal is to locate the information. For example, when using the telephone directory, the reader scans down the column until the name is found and then the number opposite the name. It is not necessary to "read" the column of names. Scanning is useful in a wide range of situations. This book contains a variety of scanning exercises which are interesting to students and very practical. The student should strive for efficiency; this requires *speed* plus *accuracy*.

Skimming and scanning are valuable reading skills that will make anyone a more efficient and flexible reader. The information and exercises provided in this text are designed to help students master these important reading techniques.

Edward Fry
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Books in the Series

EDWARD B. FRY

Reading Drills, Middle Level, Catalog No. 750, Reading Levels 4–6. Timed passages with questions, cloze passages and vocabulary exercises for building comprehension and speed. The text can be used developmentally in upper elementary, middle school and junior high and remedially in high school.

Reading Drills, Advanced Level, Catalog No. 751, Reading Levels 7–10. Timed passages with questions, cloze passages and vocabulary exercises for building comprehension and speed. The text can be used both developmentally and remedially in high school and college.

Skimming & Scanning, Middle Level, Catalog No. 780, Reading Levels 4–6. Lesson and chapter length passages with questions for developing skimming skills; specific instructions for twelve different scanning drills. The text can be used developmentally in upper elementary, middle school and junior high school.

Skimming & Scanning, Advanced Level, Catalog No. 781, Reading Levels 7–10. Lesson and chapter length passages with questions for developing skimming skills; specific instructions for twelve different scanning drills. The text can be used developmentally in both high school and college.

Dictionary Drills, Catalog No. 752, Reading Levels 7–10. Twenty-five practical drills for teaching students how to understand and use the various parts of the main entry, how to use the pronunciation key, and how to use the dictionary as a reference tool. The text is accompanied by a 30-page dictionary reprinted from the *American Heritage Dictionary*. The text can be used developmentally in high school and remedially in college.

Graphical Comprehension, Catalog No. 782, Reading Levels 7–10. Lessons for understanding, interpreting and constructing thirty-five different kinds of graphs, charts, plans, drawings, diagrams, *etc.*, including exercises to ensure learning. The text can be used developmentally in both high school and college.

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Introduction

This book is designed to be part of a reading improvement course for students in junior high school, middle school or the upper levels of elementary school. It may be used alone or in conjunction with its companion volume, *Reading Drills for Speed and Comprehension, Middle Level,* by Edward Fry. Combining these two texts creates an effective program for building reading flexibility, rate and comprehension. (See Books in the Series, page 4.)

This book features two types of timed reading drills aimed at making students faster and more flexible readers. Reading techniques are specialized and should vary according to the kind of information to be found and the amount of detail needed. Skimming and scanning are two of these specialized techniques. Each section of drills is preceded by a detailed explanation of the technique involved along with a discussion of ways to teach it to students.

The first half of the book is composed of ten skimming drills. These are interesting prose selections of about 1000 to 1500 words followed by ten multiple choice comprehension questions. However, these drills differ from the usual timed reading drills in that they are intended to be skimmed. The teacher may wish to supplement these skimming exercises by following some of the suggestions for additional practice given in "How To Teach Skimming."

The second half of the book is composed of twelve scanning drills. Each one introduces a different skill and consequently requires a special explanation. Each drill is preceded by both suggestions for the teacher and directions for the student. The teacher may wish to extend the drills by asking additional questions using the tables or word lists in the drill book, or by bringing in additional material to scan. Some of the follow-up suggestions in each drill will allow students to enjoy using their scanning skills in group activities.

If this book is to be used with students below fifth grade reading ability, the teacher is advised to select the easier drills in both sections. Readability for each skimming drill is given in the Reading Grade Level Table on the next page. The order of the selections is based on concept and interest factors as well as level of readability.

READING GRADE LEVEL

Skimming Drill	Level
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe	6
Putting the Sun to Work	5
The Changing Eskimos	4
Dinosaurs	6
Meet the North American Indians	5
The Friendly Dolphins	4
Pond Life	4
The Strange Voyage of the *Mary Celeste*	4
Freshwater Fishing	5
Where to Learn How to Be a Carpenter	6

The difficulty of each scanning drill may be judged individually. The teacher's explanation of the content organization and of the task to be undertaken will affect the difficulty level for the student. Skimming drills may be used alternately with scanning drills, or either drill section may be used alone in its entirety. The teacher might set aside a ten-week period and alternate drills between this book and *Reading Drills, Middle Level.*

Students should understand that the drills are not tests and that each person is competing with himself or herself rather than with the class. While skimming and scanning are valuable reading skills, students should have fun doing the drills. They will consider the drills more like a game than hard work if they are not graded. To alleviate student concern for grades, it is advised that the speed and comprehension scores not be a part of the recorded grade.

The most important goal is the acquisition of skills. Some students will learn to skim and scan quickly; others will show minimal progress. Students should monitor recorded progress and teachers should encourage improvement in scores.

Part 1: Skimming

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To the Teacher

How To Teach Skimming

One sign of a good reader is flexibility. Good readers are able to adapt their reading skills to suit the reading material and the purpose for reading. For example, with easy material such as a newspaper or novel, the average rate of speed for an adult may vary from 250 to 500 words per minute with about 70 percent comprehension. For a fifth grade student reading easy material, the average speed may vary from 125 to 250 words per minute.

However, there is a great deal of material that readers would like to cover either because they are interested in a particular field or because they wish to be well-informed. Using an average rate of speed to cover a large amount of reading matter would take more time than is usually available. In addition, it is not always necessary to read with a high degree of comprehension. Good readers cover large amounts of material quickly by skimming.

What Is Skimming?

Skimming is reading at the fastest speed possible while maintaining a level of comprehension lower than that obtained at average reading speeds. A reader skims to cover material quickly when lower comprehension is acceptable.

Skimming vs. Average Reading. It is important to note a basic difference between skimming and average reading. In average reading the reader omits no part of the reading matter, i.e., sentences or paragraphs. Skimming, however, requires that the reader selectively omit parts of the reading material. For example, the reader may not finish a paragraph after grasping the main idea. Or the reader may omit entire paragraphs if it serves the reading purpose. In skimming, the reader omits portions of the material to increase reading speed.

Comprehension. Skimming also differs from average reading in the accepted level of comprehension. In average reading, the goal is to achieve the best possible comprehension level (usually 70 or 80 percent) while maintaining an average reading speed. Higher comprehension levels would probably require unacceptably slow reading speeds. In skimming, a lower comprehension level is expected. An average of 50 or 60 percent comprehension is acceptable.

If skimming comprehension levels consistently reach 70 or 80 percent, it means that the reader is not skimming fast enough. Conversely, a frequent comprehension score of 30 or 40 percent indicates that the reader is skimming too quickly.

Speed. It is difficult to say exactly how fast a skimming speed should be, but a rule of thumb is that skimming speed should be twice as fast as the average reading speed. If, for example, a student's average reading speed is 200 words per minute, he or she could achieve a skimming rate of 400 words per minute or better.

The following table shows various reading rates of the good reader. Notice that flexible readers have three reading speeds: slow, average, and fast. Each of these speeds is appropriate for a specific type of reading material.

Kind of Reading	Adult Rate	Fifth-Grader Rate	Comprehension
Slow: Study reading speed used when material is difficult or when high comprehension is desired.	200 to 300 w.p.m.	75 to 150 w.p.m.	80–90%
Average: An average* reading speed is used for everyday reading of magazines, newspapers, and easier textbooks.	250 to 500* w.p.m.	125 to 250* w.p.m.	70%
Fast: Skimming is used when the highest rate is desired. Comprehension is intentionally lower.	800+ w.p.m.	400+ w.p.m.	50%

*The fastest average rates are excellent reading rates and tend to occur after the student has had some reading speed improvement training.

Note also that as reading speed increases, comprehension decreases. A student skimming at 400 words per minute cannot regularly expect to achieve much greater than 50 percent comprehension. Thus, the choice of reading speed should be appropriate for the material being read and the desired comprehension level.

To summarize, the characteristics of skimming are: (1) a selective omission of parts of the reading material; (2) an acceptance of a lower level of comprehension; and (3) an extremely rapid reading rate.

How To Skim

How does the student do a skimming exercise? How does the student achieve the fastest possible skimming rate? What material need not be read?

What to Read. Let us say that a sixth grade student wishes to skim a factual selection of several thousand words. The student should read the first paragraph or two in its entirety at the fastest average rate(200–300 words per minute) to grasp the idea of the story, the setting, a little of the author's style, the tone or mood, and so on. Frequently an author will give an introduction in the first few paragraphs, presenting an overall picture of the selection.

What to Leave Out. Once the student has an overview of the selection, he or she should begin immediately to leave out portions of the text in order to achieve a skimming rate of 400 words per minute or better. Hence, on the third or fourth paragraph, the student reads only the key sentence to get the main idea of the paragraph and skips the remaining part of the paragraph. Or the student may read the key sentences throughout the paragraph, picking up one or two important words, phrases, or numbers.

Finding the Main Idea. In skimming, the student should attempt to get the main idea of every paragraph plus a few facts.

Sometimes the key sentence will not be the first sentence in the paragraph. In some paragraphs the main idea is located in the middle or at the end. The student will then have to spend some time looking for the key sentence.

In addition, the student may come to a paragraph that does not have a key sentence; that is, the main idea is not summarized in any one sentence. It may be necessary to find several sentences or phrases that give the main idea. Or the student may have to read the entire paragraph in order to get its meaning. However, having read an entire paragraph, the student must

How To Skim

Usually the first paragraph will be read at average speed all the way through. It often contains an introduction or overview of what will be talked about.

Sometimes, however, the second paragraph contains the introduction or overview. In the first paragraph the author might just be "warming up" or saying something clever to attract attention.

Reading a third paragraph completely might be unnecessary but ... ...

continue to skim on the next few paragraphs to regain the skimming rate.

Maintaining Speed. Skimming must be done "against the clock," that is, when time is limited or when the material must be covered at the fastest possible rate. The student must avoid reading the details in order to maintain the maximum skimming speed.

An example of how a student might skim an article is shown at left. Notice that he or she reads all of the first and second paragraphs to get an overview. By the third or fourth paragraph the reader must begin to leave out material, reading only key sentences and phrases to get the main ideas and a few of the details. Note also that since final paragraphs often summarize, it is often wise to read them more fully.

Developing Skimming Ability

Set a Goal. When readers first try to skim, they often achieve speeds little better than their average reading rate. But skimming exercises must be repeated until some established goal, such as 400 words per minute, is reached. A student should set a goal that is roughly two times faster than his or her best average reading rate. (If the class averages 200 words per minute, a general goal of 400 words per minute might be set.)

Re-skim. Those who have difficulty should practice. For example, if a student skims an article at the rate of only 200 words per minute, he or she should skim the same article again in an attempt to get to 400 words per minute. Perhaps on the second attempt, the student will get to 300 words per minute. But on the third or fourth attempt, the student must leave out more material and skim faster to achieve a goal of 400 words per minute. The result might look like this:

	1st Reading	2nd Reading	3rd Reading
Article 1	160 w.p.m.	245 w.p.m.	356 w.p.m.
Article 2	225 w.p.m.	315 w.p.m.	412 w.p.m.
Article 3	337 w.p.m.	455 w.p.m.	
Article 4	425 w.p.m.		

Note the improvement on each successive drill. When the student uses this method of improving the skimming rate, the

comprehension test should be taken only after the first practice.

Practice. It is best that the student learn to skim in class. The teacher's guidance and supervision will give students a good start. However, the student should do some skimming as homework or independent study. The more the student practices, the better his or her skimming ability. Magazine articles and chapters from supplementary textbooks are a good source of material for additional skimming practice.

When practicing skimming techniques out of class, the student should set a goal of 400 words per minute even if repeated practice on the same selection is necessary. The student can check a page or two of the book or magazine to determine the approximate number of words per page and the number of pages to complete each minute in order to achieve the rate of 400 words per minute.

Check Comprehension. Skimming drills should be followed by comprehension tests; there is no point in reading material at any rate if there is no comprehension. If the students are skimming magazine articles, textbook chapters, or novels for which there are no regular comprehension tests, the teacher may help them check comprehension by: presenting a few simple questions; asking students to write paragraphs giving the main idea; or creating a class discussion about the passage skimmed.

Another interesting exercise is to have students first skim an article and write a paragraph stating the main idea and a few details; have students then reread the article at an average reading rate and write a second paragraph stating whether or not they feel that the first paragraph was essentially correct. They should write the main ideas correctly if they were wrong the first time and add a few more details. For each reading, the total reading time and the words per minute score should be recorded.

Skim Regularly. The more often students practice skimming, the more they will gain in confidence and make skimming a permanent reading skill. To establish skimming as a habit, students should make the skimming of entire magazines or of chapters in supplementary textbooks part of their regular reading lessons. Encourage students to use skimming for everyday purposes as often as possible. Once students have established skimming as a habit, it will prove valuable throughout their lives. Reinforce the idea that skimming is just one kind of reading skill; there are many times when regular reading speed or study reading speed should be used.

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