

CHAPTER 12

A Day at the Races



“‘The time has come,’
the Walrus said, ‘To talk
of many things.’”

—Lewis Carroll

In this section, there will be five exercises on improving your fixations and saccades, and ten practice reading passages. Use these to reinforce everything that you've learned. If you find yourself reverting to your old habits, stop! It's not worth it! You'll get discouraged and your rates will drop. Adjust your speed to each passage, and keep your eyes fixed on the page. **Don't do all of these at once.** Use them periodically. The real test of how much improvement you can expect from this should become apparent in real life. Use your new skills on all your reading, from newspapers to business plans, from poetry to pulp fiction.

You understand what you read by identifying it with something you already know. So the best readers are those who know a lot of things. By reading, they learn more, and then reading becomes easier still for them. By improving the way you read, you make reading easier for yourself.



I. EXERCISE 22 FIXATIONS

Move your eyes from dot to dot, using your peripheral vision to gather clusters of words with each fixation. If you find your eyes moving from word to word, you're not focusing on the dot. Stop and restart yourself at the beginning. At first, it should feel a bit awkward. As you get more practice, begin pushing yourself to a greater and greater speed.

When • Helen	asked • about	Uncle • Bob
he was • not	my • favorite	subject • of
conversation • since	the time • he	covered • me with
spices and • shoved me	into the • hot oven.	But I was • willing
to forgive • and forget	so long as • she would	promise • that there
would be • no further	repeat episodes • of his	earlier • problems
Uncle Bob • came over	wearing his • cooking	apron and • I should
have known • right there	that he • hadn't changed	and that I • should
suspect • his intentions.	As he shook • hands with	me to • apologize
I noticed his • other hand	sprinkling a • pinch of salt	above me. • He was
smiling • the whole time	asking me • how much	fat I had put • on and
measuring • my waist to	see if I was • too big for	a special • "surprise"
he had in • store for me	before dinner. • I objected	as he • basted my
sister's • forehead with	butter and • sprigs of	parsely but it, was clear

he enjoyed • the preparation so I • nearly broke down and • cried with delight. I suggested we • broil her and this made • him so happy he did a • little jig in the middle of • the kitchen. How gleeful • he looked! It was • a difficult decision I • had to make. He had to • be sent away as soon • as possible. After I called the police, • I told my sister to • shower off the butter • (he had used too much) and • then I called the pizza • place. I reminded • them "no anchovies."

II. EXERCISE 23 FIXATIONS

Move your eyes from dot to dot, using your peripheral vision to gather clusters of words with each fixation. If you find your eyes moving from word to word, you're not focusing on the dot. Stop and restart yourself at the beginning. At first, it should feel a bit awkward. As you get more practice, begin pushing yourself to a greater and greater speed.

Chester • Alexander
 crescent • wrench.
 a wrench • of any
 person, • left-handed
 They • would be
 inventing • items which
 would have • thought
 maker • invented the
 that was • used to take
 fingers. • People, it turned
 pins out • of pincushions.
 to protect • against the harsh rays of the • full moon.
 were few • takers for his unusual • and unnecessary product. • Have you heard of
 a person getting • burned by the rays • of the moon? Feeling • warm under the
 moon? Let's • mince words no more. • These people are lunatics. • Completely
 insane. This is • not to discourage any • potential inventors out • there. On the
 contrary, you • should be encouraged • that these people • were able to find
 funding for • their projects. But think • out your projects before • you proceed.
 You will • save yourself, and • others, years of needless • heartache.

invented • the
 Some • might
 type • can be
 right- • handed,
 correct. • There is
 are less • useful
 Sam • Bleikoff, a
 pin • extractor, a
 pins out • of pincushions
 out, liked • to use their
 David Lumsby • invented

left- • handed
 say • that
 used by • any
 or • ambidextrous.
 a history • of people
 than the • inventor
 noted • pincushion
 tweezer- • like item
 without • using the
 fingers • to take
 a moon • burn salve
 Needless to • say, there

III. EXERCISE 24 FIXATIONS

Move your eyes from dot to dot, using your peripheral vision to gather clusters of words with each fixation. If you find your eyes moving from word to word, you're not focusing on the dot. Stop and restart yourself at the beginning. At first, it should feel a bit awkward. As you get more practice, begin pushing yourself to a greater and greater speed.

When • cooking	Italian • food	it is • important
to act • as	much • like	an Italian • as
you can. • You	should • first	have lots • of wine
handy; • although	the French • are	known • more for
their • wine, it	doesn't • matter.	Wine is • wonderful
with any • meal.	Second, you • should	read many • books
in Latin * while cooking.	Whereas • this may	not improve • your
cooking, you • will have	a greater • appreciation	of Italian • history and
Italian culture. • Third	you should • find some	good Italian • music,
preferably • from after	the sixteenth • century	(those mandolins • always
give me a • headache).	If possible, • have a native	Italian in • the kitchen with
you. Ask • them about	where they • are from,	their family, • their friends.
The more • you know	of them • the closer	to • their cooking
you will be. • Ask them if they would • like to cook. As a matter • of fact, tell		
them it is • an honor to be invited • to cook at another's house • in your country.		
Tell them it • will be a grave insult if • they don't start cooking • right away. Then		
sit down, • pour yourself a big glass of • wine, put on some Italian • music, and		
read your book • on Italy. You are now • enmeshed in the entire • Italian		
experience. • Bon appetit!		

IV. EXERCISE 25 FIXATIONS

Move your eyes from dot to dot, using your peripheral vision to gather clusters of words with each fixation. If you find your eyes moving from word to word, you're not focusing on the dot. Stop and restart yourself at the beginning. At first, it should feel a bit awkward. As you get more practice, begin pushing yourself to a greater and greater speed.

Bank • robbery is not • the best • summer job
 a kid • can get but • it was the • only one
 my • uncle Rocco would • help me procure. • He introduced
 me to • Larry “Blue Eyes” • Dean, Stephen “Lefty” • Tubbs,
 and • Morris “the Accountant” • Kelger (Morris kept • track of
 how many • of us there were). • We watched the bank • for three days,
 carefully • noting when the bank • guards would be on break • and where
 to get the • best donuts. The police • asked us to move our • folding chairs
 from in • front of the bank on the • third day, because we • blocked
 people from • going in or out. The • next day we made our • move. Larry,
 unfortunately, • slept through his • alarm, and Steven thought • we were holding
 up the • donut store, so he went to • the wrong place. My Uncle • Rocco checked
 with Morris • to make sure there were • only two of us, but Morris • had gone on
 vacation. Rocco • also had forgotten our • weapons; I had a water • pistol and he
 brandished a • roll of Mentos menacingly. • We walked to the • bank, masks on,
 ready to tussle, • grab the loot then split, • but when we got • there, the doors
 were locked. • Apparently, my Uncle • was working off an • ancient calendar
 from the • tenth century—it was • Saturday. The bank was • closed. In disgust,
 Rocco walked • to the donut shop to get • some coffee • where • he was promptly
 robbed by • Stephen.

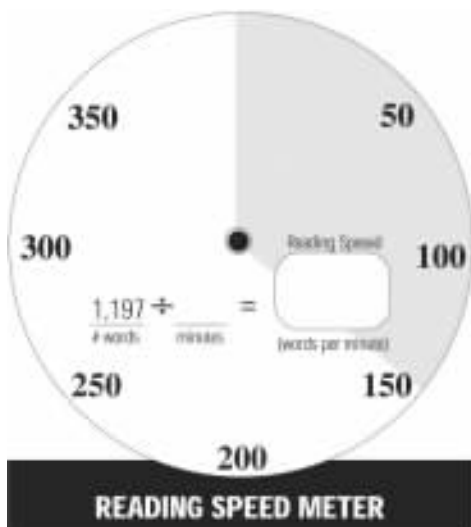
V. EXERCISE 26 FIXATIONS

Move your eyes from dot to dot, using your peripheral vision to gather clusters of words with each fixation. If you find your eyes moving from word to word, you're not focusing on the dot. Stop and restart yourself at the beginning. At first, it should feel a bit awkward. As you get more practice, begin pushing yourself to a greater and greater speed.

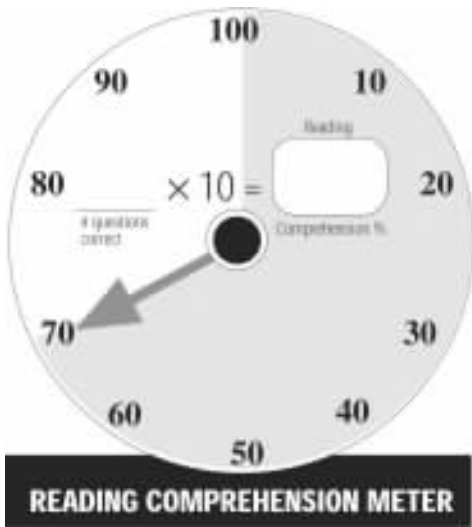
Learning • to
a young • age
self-confidence,
a feeling .of
remember • is that
nurturing, • for either
about your • choice of
wanting to • practice at
inspiration • strikes. If
or breaking • the electric guitar over • his head, choose a • quiet, personal
instrument which • will represent his • individuality, I recommend • purchasing
the triangle because • it can never get too • loud. Or a guitar with • no strings. At
last resort, buy • your child a box of • cotton balls and tell your • child the cotton
ball is the • instrument of the future—it • has to be blown on just • right to make
it sound wonderful. • Hopefully, your child • will hyperventilate and • pass out,
obviating the • need for any other instrument. • If not and your • child trades her
triangle for • a set of bongos, you can • wad the cotton balls • and stuff them in
your ears. • Even though your child • must grow, it doesn't • mean you must
grow • deaf.

READING RACETRACK DIRECTIONS

Read the following Reading Racetrack passages and answer the questions after them to find your speed and comprehension levels. Time yourself on a watch with a second hand. Time only the reading portion of the exercise, not the question portion. Then calculate your reading speed and comprehension level, using the following formulas:



Calculate your reading speed using the following formula. First, mark down how long it took you, in minutes, to read the passage (if it took you 2 minutes, 15 seconds, then it took you 2.25 minutes). Divide the number of words in the passage by that number. This is your reading speed in words per minute. For example, there are 1,197 words in this passage. If it took you 8.5 minutes to read the entire selection, then divide 1,197 by 8.5. This would result in a reading speed of 141 w.p.m.



Calculate your comprehension rate using the following formula. Multiply the number of questions you answered correctly by 10. That is your comprehension percentage. You want to keep your percentage above 70 percent for any type of reading. Below that, you start losing important information presented in the passages.

READING RACETRACK 15

Don't Think: Write!

When we write, for whom do we write? Or as we would be more likely to ask, who do we write for?

It sounds like an easy question to answer, and in some ways it is. But when it is applied to the matter of fiction, the logical answer—that we write for a specific audience—does not work. At least not for me.

Each year I teach at one or more writers' workshops. I enjoy them for many reasons, not the least of which is the opportunity to meet other workshop leaders, often writers whose work I have long admired. Writing is a solitary profession, and a writers' conference gives us a chance to get together. Another reason I enjoy the workshops is that I am forced to articulate what I have learned about the techniques of the craft of fiction writing; it is easy to get forgetful and sloppy. Having to explain imagery, simile, metaphor, point of

view, is a way to continue to teach myself as well as the people who have come to the workshop.

At one workshop, I talked, as usual, about all the hard work that precedes the writing of fiction. Often there is research to be done. For my Time Trilogy I had to immerse myself in the new physics: first, Einstein's theories of relativity and Planck's quantum theory for *A Wrinkle in Time*; then cellular biology and particle physics for *A Wind in the Door*; and astrophysics and non-linear theories of time for *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. For *The Love Letters* I had to learn a great deal more about seventeenth-century Portuguese history than I needed or wanted to know, so that the small amount needed for the book would be accurate. Before, during, and after research, the writer needs to be thinking constantly about the characters, and the direction in which the novel seems to be moving.

Does the story have the Aristotelian beginning, middle and end? How do the events of the novel relate to me, personally, in my own journey through life? What are my own particular concerns at the time of writing, and how should they affect—or not affect—the story? When I actually sit down to write, I stop thinking. While I am writing, I am listening to the story; I am not listening to myself.

"But," a young woman in the class said in a horrified tone of voice, "my creative writing teacher says that we must keep the audience in mind at all times."

That is undoubtedly true for the scientists writing an article that is expected to be understood by people who have little or no scientific background. The writer will have to keep simplifying scientific language, explaining technical terms. Keeping the audience in mind is probably valuable for reporting in newspapers and magazines. The reporter is writing for the average reader; language should be neither so bland as to be insulting, nor so technical as to demand special knowledge.

As for lawyers, I assume they have each other in mind at all times as they write. Certainly they don't have most of us in mind. Their grandiosity appalls me. In a movie contract, I was asked to grant the rights to my book to the producers, in perpetuity, throughout the universe. When I wrote in, "With the exception of Sagittarius and the Andromeda galaxy," it was accepted. Evidently the lawyers, who are writing to avoid litigation in a litigious world, did not anticipate a lawsuit from Sagittarius.

Of course I am being grossly unfair to many lawyers; I come

from a family of fine lawyers. But the language used in a will or a contract is indeed a special language, and it is not aimed at the reader who enjoys stories, the reader of fiction.

Whom, then, does the writer of fiction write for? It is only a partial truth to say that I write for myself, out of my own need, asking, whether I realize it or not, the questions I am asking in my own life.

A truer answer is that I write for the book.

“But why do you write for children?” I am often asked.

And I answer truthfully that I don’t. I haven’t been a child for a long time, and if what I write doesn’t appeal to me, at my age, it isn’t likely to appeal to a child. I hope I will never lose the child within me, who has not lost her sense of wonder, of awe, of laughter. But I am not a child; I am a grown woman, learning about maturity as I move on in chronology.

A teacher, in introducing me to a class of seventh graders, said, “Miss L’Engle has made it in the children’s field, and she is now trying to break into the adult market.”

I felt that I had better not explain to this teacher that I had no desire to break into the adult market and see my fiction in “adult bookstores.” I am not interested in writing pornography. I did explain that my first several books were regular trade novels, which means that they were marketed for a general audience, not for children. And I explained that when I have a book that I think will be too difficult for a general audience, then we will market it as a juvenile book. It is a great mistake to think that children are not capable of understanding difficult concepts in science or philosophy.

A book that has a young protagonist will likely be marketed as a children’s book, regardless of content. Since adolescents are usually

more willing than their elders to ask difficult questions, and to accept the fact that the questions don’t have nice, tidy answers but lead on to more difficult questions, approximately half of my books have young protagonists. But while I am writing, I am not thinking of any audience at all. I am not even thinking about myself. I am thinking about the book.

This does not imply anything esoteric. I do not pick up the pen and



expect it to guide my hand, or put my fingers on the keyboard of the typewriter and expect the work to be done automatically. It is work. But it is focused work, and the focus is on the story, not on anything else.

An example of the kind of focus I mean is a good doctor. The good doctor listens to the patient, truly listens, to what the patient says, does not say, is afraid to say, to body language, to everything that may give a clue as to what is wrong. The good doctor is so fully focused on the patient that personal self-consciousness has vanished. Such focused listening does not make the doctor—or any of the rest of us—less ourselves. In fact, such focused listening makes us more ourselves.

The same thing is true in listening to a story as we write it. It does not make us any less writers, this strange fact that we do not think about writing as we are writing; it makes us more writers.

1. What profession does the author of the passage liken to being a good writer?
 - (A) Lawyer
 - (B) Astronaut
 - (C) Therapist
 - (D) Doctor
 - (E) Physicist
2. Which of the following adjectives does the author use to characterize the profession of writing?
 - (A) Rigid
 - (B) Solitary
 - (C) Childish
 - (D) Noble
 - (E) Sloppy
3. A book written by the author of the above passage is called
 - (A) *A Wrinkle in Space*
 - (B) *The Wind in Time*
 - (C) *A Door in Time*

(D) *A Swiftly Tilting Universe*

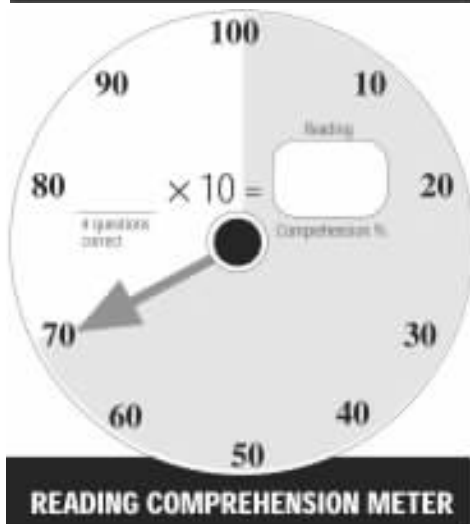
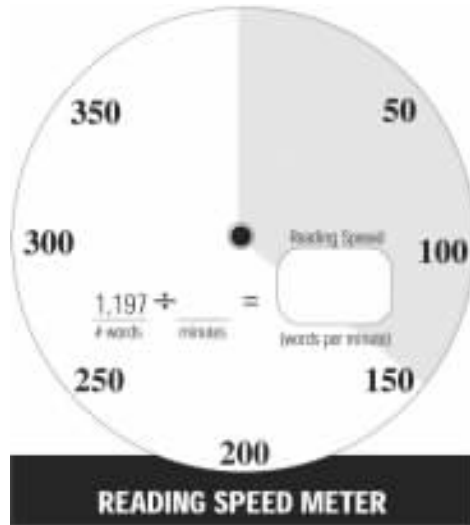
(E) *The Love Letters*

4. A “trade novel,” as defined in the passage above, is
- (A) one specifically written for children
 - (B) one written for a specific trade
 - (C) one marketed for children
 - (D) one marketed for a specific trade.
 - (E) one marketed for a general audience.
5. According to the passage, all of the following are things the author explains to her creative writing classes EXCEPT
- (A) simile
 - (B) metaphor
 - (C) imagery
 - (D) resonance
 - (E) point of view
6. The author has had to resist the label of being a(n)
- (A) children’s author
 - (B) adult author
 - (C) trade author
 - (D) popular author
 - (E) esoteric author
7. The author would most likely DISAGREE with which of the following statements:
- (A) Writing should be performed with the work in mind, not the audience.
 - (B) Teaching writing can be a valuable experience for the teacher.
 - (C) Young protagonists are often mistakenly viewed as childish.
 - (D) Difficult concepts should be written about with adults in mind, not children.

- (E) When one is writing well, the work will be focused.
8. Her annotation of the contract selling her rights, excluding those rights in Sagittarius and the Andromeda Galaxy, was meant to be
- (A) detached
 - (B) ironic
 - (C) angered
 - (D) political
 - (E) sophomoric
9. For whom does the author write?
- (A) The work
 - (B) Her audience
 - (C) Her protagonists
 - (D) Her children
 - (E) Children of all countries
10. Which of the following summarizes the main point of the passage?
- (A) Work which contains children should not be assumed to be juvenile literature.
 - (B) Whereas certain types of writers write for an audience, the fiction writer should write for the work.
 - (C) Whereas certain types of writers write for an audience, the journalistic writer should write for the work.
 - (D) Whereas certain doctors who listen are good, so are certain writers who listen to the story in their heads.
 - (E) To assume that writing is an easy task is false.

READING RACETRACK 15 METERS

For directions on how to fill out your meters, see page 240.



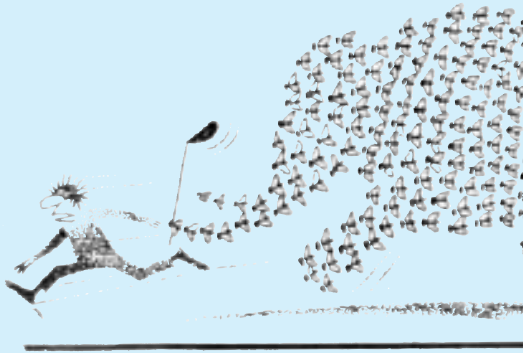
READING RACETRACK 16

Read the following passage and answer the questions after it to find your speed and comprehension levels. Time yourself on a watch with a second hand. Time only the reading portion of the exercise, not the question portion. Then calculate your reading speed and comprehension level, using the formulas at the end of the questions.

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the gray country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. In the last part of May the sky grew pale and the clouds that had hung in high puffs for so long in the spring were dissipated. The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread anymore. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.

In the water-cut gullies the earth dusted down in dry little streams. Gophers and ant lions started small avalanches. And as the sharp sun struck day after day, the leaves of the young corn became less stiff and erect; they bent in a curve at first, and then, as the central ribs of strength grew weak, each leaf tilted downward. Then it was June, and the sun shone more fiercely. The brown lines on the corn leaves widened and moved in on the central ribs. The weeds frayed and edged back toward their roots. The air was thin and the sky more pale; and every day the earth paled.

In the roads where the teams moved, where the wheels milled the ground and the hooves of the horses beat the ground, the dirt crust



broke and the dust formed. Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air; a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and a wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again.

When June was half gone, the big clouds moved up out of Texas and the Gulf, high heavy clouds, rainheads. The men in the fields looked up at the clouds and sniffed at them and half wet fingers up to sense the wind. And the horses were nervous while the clouds were up. The rainheads dropped a little spattering and hurried on up to some other country. Behind them the sky was pale again and the sun flared. In the dust there were drop craters where the rain had fallen, and there were clean splashes on the corn, and that was all.

A gentle wind followed the rain clouds, driving them on northward, a wind that softly clashed the drying corn. A day went by and the wind increased, steady, unbroken by gusts. The dust from the roads fluffed up and spread out and fell on the weeds beside the fields, and fell into the fields a little way. Now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. The rain crust broke and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke. The corn threshed the wind and made a dry, rushing sound. The finest dust did not settle back to earth now, but disappeared into the darkening sky.

The wind grew stronger, whisked under stones, carried up straws and old leaves, and even little clods, marking its course as it sailed