READING SMART

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVED READING

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INTRODUCTION

IT'S JUST NOT FAIR

Have you ever known people for whom reading seems effortless? You know, those people who casually say,"Oh,that book? Took me three hours,man,"while you are on your third week of grinding through the same title? Don't you just want to smack them?

These people aren't born different. They don't have a different type of brain. They just learned to read differently. Is this difference taught so young that there is no hope for the reader for whom reading is a chore?

Absolutely not. And being able to read quickly and efficiently doesn't mean that you have to become a complete nerd—it only means you have to figure out how these people do it, then steal from them.

The good news is we've done that for you.

DON'T KEEP ME IN SUSPENSE—HOW DO THEY DO IT?

These people read well, but very few of them know how they do it. Reading is, for most of them, second nature. They have integrated their reading skills seamlessly into how they handle all information; they read un-

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consciously, applying techniques they are not even aware of.

We've taken the best of what they do, added a few other tips, and summarized it here. By the end of this book, you will be a better reader.

Reading Smart is about breaking the barriers which make reading a chore. *It's not just about reading faster; it's about reading smarter.* Necessarily, reading smarter will improve both speed and comprehension. Increasing your reading speed without increasing your comprehension is like increasing the speed of a car without increasing the traction in the tires or the precision of the steering wheel. Sooner or later, that car's going to crash.

I'D LIKE TO READ FASTER, BUT I DON'T REALLY NEED TO

Drop this idea out of your mind—quickly. Sure, if you read smarter, it won't change where you live, what you wear, or how your breath smells. But try to think of it this way: if you walked past a table of money every day of your life, stacked to the ceiling with hundreddollar bills all of which were free for the taking, and you only swept the loose change from the corner of the table into your palm, would you say that you were making your life as good as it could be? Well, learning to read faster won't make you rich(necessarily),but it will help you increase your wealth of knowledge. Which, come to think of it, may have an effect on where you live, what you wear,and yes,even how your breath smells.—

Now wait a minute, you say. Reading smarter would be nice but it can't change my life.

Can't it?

In school, the difference between an F and a C is remembering the facts from a given piece of reading, whether it is Chemistry, History or

English. The difference between a C and an A is being able to bring other ideas, other ideas, other ideas you have read, into your analysis of a situation. If you had only As on your transcript, could that change your life?

Have you ever seen a co-worker discussing a common interest, or a popular book, with the boss? It sounds small-minded, but right there the co-worker has gained an edge on you, because the boss thinks they have more in common. Perhaps if you read more efficiently, that promotion could have been yours.

Drop the change and grab some hundreds. No matter what you do, you'll be doing a lot of reading for the rest of your life. *Reading Smart* trains you for all the reading ahead and gives you that leg up that others have enjoyed for so long.

THEN WHAT THE HECK DO I DO?

This book breaks up the reading you do into three types:

1.Textbook reading

2.Journalistic reading

3.Narrative reading

Don't worry if you don't know what this means yet. The following chapters will lay it all out for you.

You are going to learn to go into each piece of reading with an approach, a specific strategy, depending on what you need. Some of the techniques here may seem unusual. Try them. They work. If you become frustrated with a technique, stop reading the book at that point. Take a walk to the video store and rent a movie. We recommend *Roadhouse*: it's not too demanding. Then come back and try it again. Everything in this book has a point. We have no reason to steer you in the wrong direction.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Don't try to memorize every word in this book. *Reading Smart* is designed to demystify the reading process and show you what the best readers do. There will be many small techniques that will help, but examining and relearning the basic elements of reading is more important. For example, when you learned that electrical sockets were dangerous, did you memorize a list of things not to do to the electrical socket? Did you write:

1.Don't stick finger in socket.
2.Don't lick socket.
3.Don't stick toe in socket.

No, you got the general idea, and when the situation arose, you used logic to decide what to do. You should do the same with reading. We'll show you the larger idea, and you'll apply it to the reading. (By the way, don't stick a paper clip in an electrical socket. It can short out a whole power line.)

If you find yourself memorizing without understanding, or doing things that confuse you, you're doing the opposite of what we want you to do. **Mark up this book as you read.** Write questions in the margin. They should be answered by the end of each cnapter.

Trying new techniques in reading is difficult, and it will seem awkward at first. Do all of the **Exercises** and the **Reading Racetracks**—they are designed to get you used to approaching reading in a specific way. The Exercises immediately follow each technique, so use them as an accurate gauge of how clear the techniques are to you. The Reading Racetracks are only a part of trying out your new techniques. If when you put down this book you don't try to use the techniques on everything you

read (from the newspaper to *War and Peace*), then you won't improve at all. This is a practical manual on how to be a better reader. This is not theory. It is designed for real life.

WHAT DO I NEED?

What do you need to read smart? Vision helps. So does a brain. Bring a pen and paper (yes—even though this is reading you need a pen), and some desire to improve your reading. This is all you need.

Change will not happen overnight. Don't expect to go to bed a caterpillar and wake up a butterfly (if you wake up and you are a butterfly, you've got bigger problems). But you can expect improvement, and the more time and effort you put into learning the techniques, and the more confidence you have in the approach, the more improvement you can expect.

Most of all, if you view this as a chore, as a horrible task you have to go through, you can expect only limited success. This book is designed to be non-horrible. In fact, it should be fun sometimes, and there is nothing more fun than succeeding at something you set your mind to doing.

So have fun with this book, and when you're done you can try reading it again, this time using our techniques. We'll bet it takes you less time and you'll remember more! Enjoy.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Doesn't Everyone Read Well?

"Men should use common words to say uncommon things, but they do the opposite."

—Schopenhauer

We all learn to read in basically the same way. We're shown symbols and taught to associate those symbols with sounds and meanings. The rest is reinforcement and repetition: See Jane run. Run, Jane, run. Sleep, student, sleep.

How could your teachers tell you were learning to read? By listening to you reading out loud. How fast can you read out loud? About 150 words per minute. How fast does the average person read? About 150 words per minute. Hmm.

YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN

Through the rest of your life, you're on your own as far as reading goes. You will be inundated with different types of reading: newspapers, textbooks, essays, fiction, memos, and magazines. You're expected to wade through this ocean of information with no further guidance.

Were your teachers insane?

After you learned how to count, did your teachers expect you to figure out everything up through calculus by yourself? No, they taught you. After you realized a ball dropped from your hand falls to the floor, did they expect you to derive the laws of physics? Of course not. They taught you.

So why did they abandon you in reading? Frankly, it beats us. There is no single more important skill in school, work, and life than reading. The best we can figure is that the same people who set the curriculum in schools, who teach and train you for the future, read well all by themselves. No one ta-

ught them, so they feel no need to teach you.

Pretty nice of them, huh?

Even if you were to ask them to teach you, your teachers would be hard-pressed to explain how they themselves read well. Reading is an internal process, ingrained so deeply that people are barely aware of the act of reading. It's an automatic response, like the way you raise your hands when a snowball comes flying at your face.

What we have done in this book is drag that process into the open, to make it visible for you. Once you realize that there is no genetic difference between people who read well and you—only that they unconsciously use certain approaches that work well—the sooner you can realize your potential as a reader.

Off to the races

To help you achieve your reading potential, we have included throughout the book a bunch of short passages we call Reading Racetracks. The Reading Racetracks include a variety of writing styles and forms: short stories, textbook passages, magazine articles—even a couple of poems. Some of the stuff will be hard, some will be fun; all of the passages will help you improve your reading skills.

READING RACETRACK 1

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 following the questions.

Although the conventional American view has been that parties would perform better if they were internally democratic, the question is by no means as simple as the standard view suggests. Our starting point must be the functions we want parties to perform, and to perform well. If one of these is to facilitate popular control over elected officials—as it surely is—then it does not follow that this result is to be obtained only, or even best, by internal party democracy.

An analogy may help to clarify the point. Political parties are sometimes likened to business firms competing for customers—the customers being in this case the voters. And just as business firms are driven by competition to satisfy consumers, even if they are internally not governed by consumers in the way that a consumers"cooperative is, so, it is sometimes argued, competitive parties will fulfill all of the essential functions of democratic control listed earlier, even though each party is internally controlled by its leaders. If the main function of competing parties is to insure that the views of voters are translated into government policies, then it is less important that parties be internally democratic than they be responsive to the view of the voters.

Would greater internal democracy insure that the parties would be more responsive to the voters? If we take presidential nominations as the most crucial test case, the answer is not as clear as one might hope.

For one thing, changes in procedures intended to insure greater internal democracy may only shift control from one set of political activists to another. Political activists are, roughly speaking, of two kinds. One is the familiar party "regular,"party leaders who over a considerable period of time occupy positions of influence in the party and regularly devote a large share of their time, energy, and resources to party activities. The others are the "irregulars,"insurgents and amateurs who become active in behalf of a particular cause or candidate. Having been drawn into a campaign, some of the irregulars may later become regulars, but many drop out after the campaign is over, or bide their time until another attractive cause or candidate

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comes along.

The difficulty is that the insurgents may be no more representative of the opinions of a majority of voters than the regulars—and quite possibly they may be less so. Both parties provide evidence on this point. In 1964, the most ideologically conservative activists in the Republican party, a group of insurgents whose views probably represented only a minority among Republican voters and an even smaller minority in the electorate as a whole, seized control of the nominating convention from the Republican "establishment," nominated Senator Barry Goldwater and suffered one of the three or four worst defeats in the entire history of the party.

The Goldwater insurgency in the Republican party was duplicated in the Democratic party by the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. McGovern was an insurgent candidate who gathered around him an enthusiastic core of activists, most of whom were irregulars without prior political experience and his candidacy was probably aided somewhat—though not decisively—by a change in party rules intended to make the Democratic convention more representative of previously underrepresented groups—specifically blacks, women, and youth. The McGovern forces won a majority of delegates elected in the primaries and then went on to victory in the Democratic convention. In the election, McGovern suffered the worst defeat of any Democratic candidate in fifty years.

The delegates to the Democratic convention, it turned out, were highly unrepresentative of Democratic supporters. Of all the groups at the convention, the insurgent McGovern delegates deviated most from the views of rank-and-file Democrats. The women delegates chosen under the new rules were not at all representative of rank-and-file Democratic women, nor the youth of rank-and-file young people. Even the black delegates were rather unrepresentative of attitudes among the black population at large and among black Democratic supporters. Ironically, in 1972, the delegates to the Republican convention were much closer to the views of rank-and-file Democrats in the country at large than were the delegates to the Democratic convention.

In the face of experiences like these, some people concluded that the parties were still not democratic enough in their internal organization since in both cases the insurgents proved to be unrepresentative of broader opinion. It was thought necessary to bring about even more

control by rank-and-file party followers, reducing even further the influence of party leaders and activists. From this perspective, the rapidly expanding participation in presidential primaries noted above is a sign of health in the political parties.

Write your time down and answer the following questions based on the information contained in the previous passage:

1. According to the passage, what does "internally democratic"mean?

(A)Only Democrats are members.
(B)Both Democrats and Republicans can be members.
(C)The organization obeys the wishes of all people.
(D)The election of delegates is done democratically.
(E)It was founded by Democrats.

2. The main point of the passage is to

(A)show the health and the internal voting process of the Republican party in the 1960s and 1970s
(B) show the abundance of internal democracy in the two-party system
(C)illuminate the internal voting process
(D)show that internal democracy does not necessarily ensure accurate representation
(E)show the health of the Democratic party

3. Which example most supports the author's premise?

(A)Goldwater's candidacy
(B)McGovern's candidacy
(C)Both
(D)Neither

4.Barry Goldwater's defeat can be ascribed to

(A) a small but vocal minority within the Democratic party

(B) competition from George McGovern
(C) excessive conservatism among mainstream Republicans
(D) the inexperience of his party's "regulars"
(E) the capture of the Republican platform by extremists

5. Which, if any, party benefited from the change in rules that assisted McGovern's candidacy?

(A) The Republican Party
(B) The Democratic Party
(C) Both
(D) Neither

6. Which statement would the author most likely agree with?

(A)Political parties are run like businesses.
(B) Political parties should be run like businesses.
(C) Businesses should be run more democratically.
(D) Political parties can be likened to businesses in their organization.
(E) Business and politics don't mix.

7. The author uses the term "rank-and-file? to mean

(A) extremist
(B) military
(C) civil servants
(D) party "regulars"
(E) ordinary

8. According to the passage, what must be the "starting point"for any discussion about making a party function efficiently?

(A) What party a person belongs to
(B) What political agenda the party maintains
(C) What functions the party should perform
(D) What form the party should take

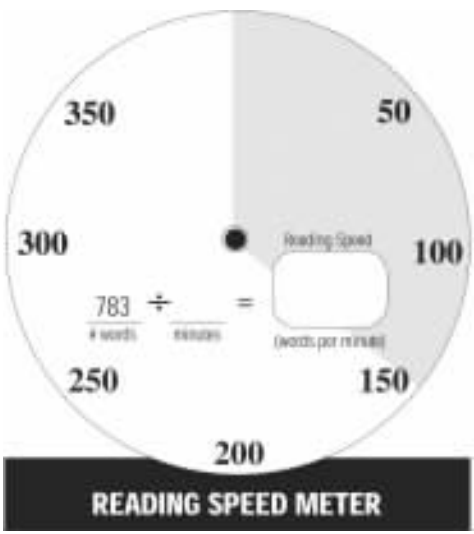
(E) A common definition of efficiency

9. Changes in procedure intended to ensure greater democracy

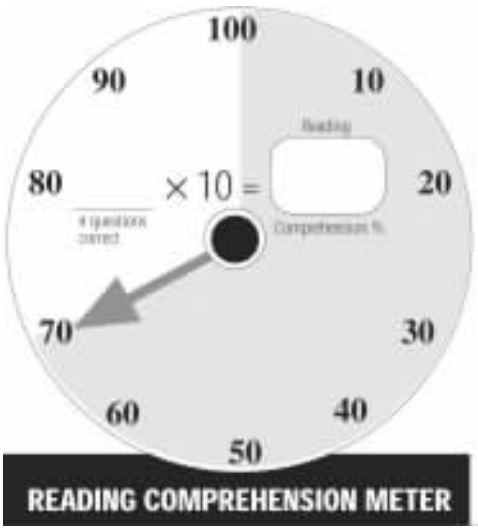
(A) are unusual and difficult to enforce
(B) may remove any hope of extremist issues being discussed
(C) may not result in agreed-upon change
(D) aren't necessarily beneficial to extremist groups
(E) may only shift control from one unrepresentative group to another

10. According to the passage, a sign of health in the political parties is

(A) the expanding participation in presidential primaries
(B) the expanding membership of both major political parties
(C) the declining number of rule changes since 1974
(D) the declining number of party "irregulars"in both major political parties
(E) the expanding participation in the presidential elections



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 783 words in this passage. If it took you 4 minutes to read the entire selection, then divide 783 by 4. This would result in a reading speed of 196 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.

DON'T DRIVE 55

Federal funding for transportation depends on each state mandating a speed limit of 55 miles per hour on highways (except for where it's 65—but you know what we mean). The campaign—which has littered the landscape on television, in newspapers, on large signs blocking scenic views, that informed people of the law—was the genius phrase "Drive 55." It rhymed, was memorable and had the proper effect. Most drivers knew about and obeyed the 55-mile-per- hour speed limit.

But do you want to drive 55 all the time? What if you were in a hospital zone? What if you were looking for a parking space in a crowded city? The autobahn in Germany? On roads slick with rain or snow? Driving 55 in these places would be dangerous and irresponsible. People who know tell you. Your own common sense tells you. You drive differently depending on the circumstances.

Drawing by John O' Brien; © 1993 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

This applies to reading as well

How you are going to read is fundamentally linked to what you are reading, just as the speed at which you are driving is fundamentally linked to the road conditions. Should you read a textbook the same way you read a novel? No way. The better you understand that your reading approach depends on *what* you are reading, the more your reading skills will improve.

In other words, don't always drive 55. If you use the same approach for every type of reading you have to do, sometimes you will be right on track. Other times you will be reading too fast or too slow, missing important information, and wondering why you had to read the same sentence three or four times. If you listen to your common sense, you'll