

TOPIC 1A: READING COMPREHENSION FUNDAMENTALS

“The connection between reading speed and comprehension; a film is made up of still images flashed in rapid succession to simulate movement. Slow down the film, and the movement and meaning slows and the film’s impact is diminished. Viewers won’t learn as much about the film as if it were shown at normal speed. With reading the same thing can happen. When a person reads word by word, like frame by frame, they are not reading on the level of ideas. You need to read on some level that’s more conversational and allows things to coalesce into ideas themselves.”

- Doug Evans, Institute of Reading Development



Reading Slowly

A slow reader will read every word in a sentence, one at a time. If this describes the way that you read, notice how many times your eyes move as you proceed across a line of text. Reading every word and “fixing” your eyes on each word requires a considerable amount of time. Before you get to the end of a long sentence, chances are you have forgotten the beginning of that sentence, so you look back at the beginning – just to make sure that you got all of the information. The same process occurs with paragraphs, or with whole essays or textbook chapters.

Reading Quickly

If you train yourself to read quickly, rather than slowly, you will notice that several changes will occur in the way that you absorb and remember information from your reading.

TIPS

- You will move your eyes fewer times, so you get through a reading passage more quickly.
- Since you get through a reading passage more quickly, you will be more likely to remember what you have read without having to look back to the beginning of a long sentence. This ability to remember more happens when you begin to process ideas, rather than single words.
- You will finish reading assignments more quickly and remember what you have read more accurately.



Reading for Main Topic

The main idea is, most often, stated in a topic sentence of a paragraph. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in the paragraph, but it may be any sentence including the last one! Sometimes it is only implied, or suggested. You must figure out what main idea connects all the sentences. The remaining sentences in the paragraph add supporting details to explain or tell more about the main idea. More than one paragraph may give supporting details about one main idea.

Read this paragraph from *The Power of Positive Attitude* by Jerry Lopper.

The Power of Positive Attitude

“Positive attitude, positive thinking, and optimism are now known to be a root cause of many positive life benefits—the good life and well-being. You’ll live longer and be healthier and happier with a positive attitude toward life. In addition, you’re more likely to be successful. Learn to use the power of thinking positive, adopting positive attitudes, and affirmations to gain important life benefits. What is Attitude? Attitude is a mental position relative to a way of thinking or being; a leaning toward that which you believe. A positive attitude is, therefore, the inclination to generally be in an optimistic, hopeful state of mind. A positive attitude and optimistic thinking early in life predict health and well-being in later years. Analysis of 99 Harvard graduates found a strong correlation between their optimistic thinking as college students and good health at age 40 and above. Even if you have been a pessimistic, negative thinker for many years, it’s not too late to change your way of thinking and reap the benefits of a positive attitude.”

One sentence tells how positive attitude, thinking, and optimism are the root cause of positive life benefits. Two other sentences describe the benefits of being positive and the definition of attitude. Additional sentences explain how a positive attitude can support better health overall in life. The last sentence states how it is not too late to change your way of thinking, even if you have been pessimistic, to achieve a positive attitude and to reap the benefits of that way of thinking. The implied main idea connecting all the sentences shows how a positive attitude will provide better health and overall well-being throughout life.

Reading for Details

There are two ways to read for details. The first is when you are reading to absorb all the information contained in the piece you are reading. The second is when you are trying to find the answer to a specific question.

Reading to Recognize all Information

When reading to recognize all information, you need to read the entire document, understand the main topic(s) and focus on the key characteristics for the topic(s). If the information is vital to your job, you can take notes as you read to help you remember the key points. The notes should be in the form of:

Topic	Specific item 1
	Specific item 2
	Specific item 3.

Using the story above, your notes could be:

How a positive attitude can help your overall health and well-being:

1. live longer, healthier and happier with a positive attitude toward life
2. more likely to be successful
3. positive attitude = an optimistic, hopeful state of mind
4. positive attitude and optimistic thinking early in life predict health and well-being in later years
5. even a pessimistic, negative thinker for years, not too late to change thinking and reap the benefits of a positive attitude

After taking notes, you can read and review your notes from time to time to help you remember what you read. Often you are reading for details but the information is not important enough to make notes. Remember that it has been proven that reading quickly helps with long-term memory more than reading slowly.

Note Taking Methods

One way to be sure that you get all the important details while you are reading is to take notes. If you own the material that you are reading, and will not have to make additional photocopies, you can use a highlighter to highlight key points. If you do not own the material, use "sticky" notes and write the key points on those and stick them to the appropriate page, or make notes on a separate piece of paper.



Reading to Find Specific Information

When reading to find specific information, you do not need to read the full text. You can skim to find the specific information you require. What is this story about below?

The Trench-Digger Story

An elderly couple retired to the countryside – to a small isolated cottage overlooking some rugged and rocky countryside. One early morning the woman saw from her window a young man dressed in working clothes walking on the land, about a hundred yards away. He was carrying a spade and a small case, and he disappeared from view behind an area of trees. The woman thought no more about it but around the same time the next day she saw the man again, carrying his spade and a small case, and again he disappeared behind the trees. The woman mentioned this to her husband, who said he was probably a farmer or gamekeeper setting traps, or performing some other country practice that would be perfectly normal, and so not to worry.

However after several more sightings of the young man with the spade over the next two weeks the woman persuaded her husband to take a stroll early, before the man tended to arrive, to the trees to investigate what he was doing. There they found a surprisingly long and deep trench, rough and uneven at one end, becoming much neater and tidier towards the other end. “How strange,” the old lady said, “Why dig a trench here and in such difficult rocky ground?” and her husband agreed. Just then the young man appeared earlier than his usual time. “You’re early,” said the old woman, making light of their obvious curiosity, “We wondered what you were doing and we also wondered what was in the case.”

“I’m digging a trench,” said the man, who continued, realizing a bigger explanation was appropriate, “I’m actually learning how to dig a good trench, because the job I’m being interviewed for later today says that experience is essential – so I’m getting the experience. And the case, it’s got my lunch in it.” He got the job.

As you can see, skimming quickly you determined that the young man got a job. As you read the story more closely, he was gaining experience in order to achieve a job.

What is the main idea of the story?

What does the story reveal about the young man?

Read the story and take notes to assist in coming to the conclusion that:

The young man demonstrated he had the initiative and self-development necessary to focus on career advancement and work toward obtaining a job requiring experience that he did not previously have.