

Speed Reading

or more aptly, reading with optimum efficiency

Don't waste your time with a speed reading book: the very concept is oxymoronic and hypocritical. Speed reading is not at its core about faster reading as it commonly believed. Rather, it is about skipping words that aren't important. It's about skipping the fluff, the flavor text, the ubiquitous case studies, and the incessant repetition of the same idea over and over again in slightly different ways and needless expansion of painfully simple ideas such as this entire last sentence. If you had skipped it, by now you'd be twice as far along in the article. Got it?

Writer's Get Paid By the Word

If I'm lucky, I maybe got a quarter for that topic heading -- just a quarter. It's not much, hard to feed a family of four on a quarter, so needless to say, I'm motivated to expand on that simple idea and turn it into a buck or two by writing a few more sentences -- not that I'll tell you anything new. Please notice, if you will, how my needs and yours might not be aligned. If you're reading for fun, knock yourself out; but if you're reading for information, please keep in mind: writers get paid by the word. They've got no incentive to cut those words short -- it sort of cuts into their bottom line.

The Topic Headings Say It All

Yeah, I admit it; this topic is just a repeat of the previous one. Us writers like to do that a lot. Basically, when we're preparing to write a book or an article, we make an outline -- if not literally than at least conceptually. And I can reduce an entire book to an outline on a single piece of paper. I guess you'd call that the table of contents. I can also do the same thing for each chapter. There's probably a fancy word for that, but I just call it the chapter outline. And now, when I'm writing, I take that chapter outline and expand everything on it by ten and fifty times, churning out a page or more

for every sentence or idea on the outline. If you're not interested in the babble and you want to cut to the chase, as a reader all you have to do is work the process in reverse and reduce the book or article back to its outline. And if the author has been kind enough to provide you with subject headings, this shouldn't be that difficult. Guess what it said on my outline for this paragraph? That's right: the topic heading says it all. You're really getting the hand of this, aren't you.

Know Why You're Reading What You're Reading

Maybe that seems cryptic, but it wasn't meant to be. Or then, maybe I don't like the idea of you skimming over my article. Us writers are an egotistical bunch, and we'll do pretty much anything to sucker a reader in. That said: before you pick up a book or magazine, it helps to know what you are expecting from it. Are you reading for pleasure? Do you want to learn the subject at hand? Are you cramming for an exam? Or do you just want to get a feel for the book? I would never attempt to speed read Jane Austin's Pride and Prejudice, not because I couldn't, but because there would be no point to it. If I didn't want to enjoy a great piece of literature for it's own sake and savor every last word, I'd be better off spending my time with a study guide. And by the same token, you'll never catch me lingering over the compelling turn of phrases to be found in an introductory textbook on psychology, because in the end, they are nothing more than very comprehensive study guides. If you already know the difference between the Id, Ego, and Superego, there is no reason to read the words under that subject heading ever again!

Stop Revering the Written Word

I think this one is sort of self-explanatory. Most books aren't holy; they aren't writ from the hand of God. How much you paid for a book has very little to with how much it is worth or how long you should invest of your life reading it. I get my books from the discard pile at the library. They're free, so I treat them like

garbage. I've been known to put a stack of them in the bathroom and then whenever I cop a squat I open a book, page through it and when I done for that session -- maybe a chapter, maybe more -- I rip out whatever I've read. Just flat out destroy the book and toss the pages I just got doing through flipping through into the garbage. You don't save the newspaper, do you? You use it to line the bird cage when you're done. Well, books are no different. Get in. Get out. And throw it away.

What's in a Book?

Only one more section after this one, so if you still don't know how to speed read, now's the time to learn how. A beginning course in Economics can be distilled down to roughly one hundred ideas. Everything in the field can be built up from just a handful of basic ideas. The demand curve goes up; the supply curve goes down; where they intersect is the price and quantity produced in a free market; and so on. It's just a hundred ideas. Everyone out there hawking a speed reading program says people using their system have a 70-80-90% retention rate. The obvious question to ask is retention of what? That the demand curve goes up and the other bare bones ideas. This is what it takes to pass the class. This is economics 101. And when you get right down to it, that's to be found in a basic Economics textbook.

Building Confidence

Now even though a Econ textbook only contains one hundred separate ideas, most folks think it contains more than this, so they spend a disproportional time reading the book. Why? Lack of confidence. They think they are going to miss something. Well, you aren't. Grab that textbook, read the headings, read the definitions in the sidebar, and look over the pictures, graphs, and diagrams. Then come lecture day, follow along as the professor regurgitates the book section by section. Not enrolled in school, grab a book or article that a friend or your spouse has read, speed read it (go through it quickly -- just do it), and then hold a

conversation with them about it. You'd be surprised how much of that book you know, and you might even know specific sections better than them... and they read the book.

Still Not Getting It?

Speed reading is like watching a movie or TV show in fast forward. You've done that right? Well, do the same thing with a book. Drop in read a line here and there and then move on. Turn those pages. Read the first three words of every paragraph and if the author is not explaining a fact move on.

You see, I knew this guy -- let's call him Bob -- and Bob got suckered into reading the case histories. He thought he was going to learn something reading the case histories, and I guess he was. He was going to learn that Abby tried my method of speed reading for only one week and she was reading 50% faster with a 24% greater retention of knowledge. Of course, what really blew Bob away is when he learned about Rodney. You see, Rodney is a plumber, but he always wanted to be an art historian, don't really know why, but there it is. Only he was buried under this immense course load...

Are you still reading?

If you are, its probably because you're not interested in speed reading? And that's not necessarily a bad thing. If you read a book on the 1,000 best jokes ever in three minutes, you won't laugh. A book like that should be read in 1,000 separate installments as slowly as humanly possible.

But most books -- and most articles -- just aren't that good. Save yourself some time for the good books and burn through the bad ones ASAP, and if that means ripping out pages without even looking at them because its time to change the birdcage, then that's exactly what it means.

Try These Nifty Exercises

Decide in advance how much time you want to spend with a book, set a timer, and at the beep destroy the book.

Skip every other page in a magazine -- or at least every other paragraph.

Read the first paragraph in an article and then the last before deciding if you want to read what's in-between.

Go to library or bookstore and gloss through every book on a subject (or three books, at least spending no more than ten minutes on each. Compare mentally the differences between the books as to content.

Find twenty facts -- interesting, important, or novel -- in a book by flipping around in it and then throw the book away.

The fundamental trick to speed reading is not to read a whole bunch of words quickly, but to quickly skip over the words that contain no important information.

At end of article (especially of the form you read over an over again), review to see what part you wouldn't spend time on again. Was all the information contained in the opening (stating the discussion) and the ending (stating the conclusion), then why read the intervening without reading those two sections first?

{This really is all there is to the Brett Paufler Speed Reading Course, however if you would like me to come to your site and read a printed copy of this seminar, I would be more than happy to, cash in advance, that check will probably need another zero on it for me to be interested, this and other exclusions may apply.}

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