

Tips for Improved Reading

This could be a life-changing article as you continue to read the entire book of Ephesians once per week. Only read this, though, if you have a desire to improve your reading habits.

We were taught to read as youngsters, but most adults do not enjoy reading. Where is the disconnect? In pursuing an answer, I stumbled across some simple, but interesting ideas about reading. I want to pass on these tips that could *double* your reading speed while also *skyrocketing* your retention and comprehension. Startling?

How do we read?

The eyes can only bring in images when they are stationary. Reading is therefore *only* accomplished during the fractional seconds in which the eyes fixate (when they are stationary), not when the eyes are moving. The more quickly the eyes feed images and words to the mind, the more quickly and accurately the mind grasps the thoughts. Your mind is *not* the limiting factor (experts say we only utilize 3-5% of our mental capacity). I learned to read in early elementary school...

- by focusing on a single word at a time,
- by sounding out words and syllables vocally, and
- by reading out loud in groups with frequent corrections from the teacher as the teacher instructed me to go back and re-read what I had just misread.

Learning to read like this develops *motor reading*, the slowest of the three ways to read and also the one with the lowest comprehension. *Motor reading* is not wrong. It may be an excellent way to begin. It has inherent resistors, or problems, though, that undermine effective reading. Most adult readers have never broken free from these reading relics we learned at the beginning. Here are some problems associated with *motor reading* (named *motor* because there are movable parts). Mark the ones you identify with.

The problem of single word reading. As children, we were taught to fix on a single word at a time, or a single syllable. Many adult readers still read this way. Listen to your mind as you read to yourself to evaluate.

The problem of vocalization: The reader will physically move his or her lips as they silently read, often mumbling the words audibly, even when reading to himself or herself. Place a finger on your vocal chords as you read to yourself to check this out. This is how we were first taught to read as children, sounding out words, and the habit continues.

The problem of regressions. Regressions mean that we read a word, then go back to be sure we read it correctly. It arises from our desire as children to get it right in front of our teachers and our peers, peers. We do not trust our minds to comprehend (did you stop and look back because of the repeated word “peers”?)

Did you notice how these three problems line up with how we were taught to read? *What are the results?* This type of reader tires quickly because so much muscular activity is involved in reading. Usually the reader has low comprehension. Does this sound familiar?

There is no shame in *motor reading*. Most of us learned to read this way and many adults still do. But we all have the opportunity in the next weeks together in *Mining God’s Word* to change some of these old habits and break into new territory characterized by growing enjoyment and the possibilities that effective reading offers. How can we break out of the first level of reading (*motor reading*) into the second level (*mental reading* where the words are thoughts in the mind,

but not vocalized) or eventually into the most efficient level of reading (*visual reading* where the mind grasps without inward vocalization)? Let's work at replacing the three basic problems inherent in *motor reading* with new habits. Do it physically now to begin to break the habit.

How do we break out of vocalization? Lip movement and vocalization can be eliminated with great ease and also with astonishing rapidity. Build the opposite habit. Render the vocal organs incapable of movement. A simple means is to put two fingers into your mouth, using them to separate upper and lower teeth and hold down the tongue. No one can articulate words with the mouth hanging open. If that does not work for you, try quietly humming while you read, also preventing vocalization.

How can we break the habit of one-word reading? Since reading is done during the fractional second of eye-fixation, efficient readers absorb a number of words at a single fixation. We absorb a phrase or concept at one time. Think of your peripheral vision. Point with your finger at the middle of this line and focus on the **tip** of your finger. What do you see? Yes, the fingertip. But what do you see surrounding your finger in less clear detail? *Other words!*

One key to reading, then, is the absorption by the eyes of larger numbers of words at each fixation. Take a bigger gulp of words at one time and your speed increases. Let's say there are ten words on this line. Slower readers move to this line and experience nine more fixations (one for each remaining word), which means many more non-reading gaps. A better reader may have three fixations per line, meaning only two more non-reading times. Decreasing the number of fixations rapidly *increases* the reading speed and also *increases* comprehension because the message arrives more quickly to the waiting mind.

Words alone have little meaning without a context (the words surrounding it). Thoughts come in phrases or sentences, not in single syllables or words. Until the whole string of words arrives, our mind idles like a powerful Ferrari at a stop light. Our mind eagerly anticipates bringing meaning out of the jumbled words. Like the next sprinter in a relay race waiting for the baton, our minds are unable to spring forward to process until the rest of the words arrive. When my eyes feed my mind one word at a time, I grasp the concepts on the page choppily, disconnectedly, slowly. It's like an old, slow computer that brings up a large web page one agonizing panel after another. Part of the solution is to fight the urge to regress or read single words.

Suppose there are two boxes in front of you, both nailed to the top of the counter. Box A contains five pounds of uncooked beans. Box B is empty. Your task is to transfer all the beans from Box A into Box B. How do you proceed? You could pick up one bean at a time, look it over thoroughly, then drop it into Box B. By the time the task is completed, you would be tired, bored, and finishing out of pure duty. Why?

Because this method is so inefficient. You could double your speed by picking up two at a time. To accomplish it quickly and efficiently, you would grab handful after handful. The more you grabbed each time, the sooner you'd be finished, and the less likely you would tire out. Our eyes and mind have the capacity to grab up "handfuls" of words at each fixation. We can read like the wind. The more words we absorb in a single fixation, the faster we read.

Widening the range of fixation (the number of words you take in at a glance) not only increases speed, but also reduces fatigue and improves comprehension because one word alone has little meaning outside its context. The phrase, sentence or paragraph gives words meaning. Word by word reading forces our minds to slow down because our eyes feed it words devoid of meaning. Slowness is caused by narrow fixations, by word-by-word absorption, and by the resulting delay

between perception and interpretation. Reading phrases improves speed, skyrockets understanding, and makes reading more enjoyable. We get to our end purpose more quickly...fuel on which to think actively. The more smoothly the eye and mind cooperate, the more rapid and efficient the whole process is.

How can we lessen regressions? Purposely read for main ideas. Brush away non-essential words and details to get to the significant thoughts quickly. Give up excessive attention to details...for now. Later, pick up the color. Many regress because something struck their attention and they do not want to miss it. Rather than ponder now, read rapidly the first time through the material with a pen or pencil in hand. Place a quick check or dash next to anything you would like to return to later and a question mark by what is unclear. Push on. Don't stop. No dawdling. With your increased reading speed, you will have *extra time* to return later to those paragraphs you marked and to read them more thoroughly. You will be surprised at the comprehension you pick up with this simple tip.

Choose to concentrate better. Concentration is a skill sharpened over time. Once it's developed and sharpened, the ability to focus will improve every area of your life. Trust your mind and choose *not* to go back. When you first notice that your mind has wandered, bring it back with a gentle pressure, but without condemnation. Some have been helped by sweeping their pen, pencil or finger down the page in successive "S-curves" as a guide to keep their eyes moving forward. Remember that *no* reading is happening during the time your eyes regress.

Our mind leaps to find meaning in what we're reading. When we vocalize, regress, or read one word at a time, our mind shoots back a message: "*I'm not getting it, dude!*" Then we tend to regress to find out what we missed. Regression is not the solution! We need to learn to trust the phenomenal mind that God gave us. As an example, read what is below.

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I'm encouraging "learning by doing;" taking time to read more during our weeks together. What a great opportunity you have before you to *do* this. I learned to drive a car by getting behind the wheel, starting the engine, shifting into gear and driving away. I would learn to play a guitar by diligently practicing for several hours a day. I learn to paint by painting, to compose by composing, to operate a computer by operating a computer, to swim by jumping into the water and flailing about. What is your *choice*?

Stop now!

Pick up a pen or pencil and begin *now*. Re-read this article with these few simple tips in mind.