

# Library Helpsheet



## Reading Skills

### Methods of reading

We all use a number of reading methods depending on what we want to know and how quickly we want to know it. Here are a few common methods:

Reading Method	What is it?	What is the purpose?
Detailed reading	Reading the whole text carefully and thoughtfully – but not necessarily slowly	Complete understanding of the text and subject
Reading for enjoyment	Reading at whatever pace suits you	Pleasure
Skimming	Finding out what a chapter, book or webpage is mainly about	General idea of what is in the text
Scanning	Search for specific words by running your eye down the page quickly	Fact finding
Detecting bias	Some written work aims to be persuasive e.g. adverts, political leaflets etc. – you need to separate opinion from fact	Make up your own mind and form your own opinion
Critical reading	Slower reading to assess the content of a document, or for making notes	Analyse information or for making notes

### Skimming

Skimming is a method of reading where you skim a page, chapter of a book, a magazine or webpage to get an idea of what it is about.

You don't read every word, just look at:

- Title of the book, description on the back of the book, chapter headings
- Title of the webpage, menu headings
- Summary - if the chapter has a summary, read it first
- First sentence in each paragraph or the first paragraph of a chapter
- Last sentence in each paragraph or the last paragraph of a chapter
- Diagrams, graphs or charts – a picture has instant impact
- Words in **bold** or *italics* – which indicates important keywords or ideas, so read the paragraph around these words



### Scanning

Scanning is a method of quickly reading a page to find a specific piece of information you need – usually a keyword or phrase. Firstly use the contents page or index to identify the relevant page for your keyword or topic. Go to the page and run your eye over the page looking for your keyword – you don't need to read every word. Once you spot your keyword, read the paragraph around it closely to get the information you need.

If you are looking at a webpage, you can use the **find on this page** option (in the **Edit** menu in Internet Explorer) or **find** option (in **options** in Google Chrome) to search for a keyword and each occurrence of the keyword will be highlighted.



Skimming and scanning techniques are an important skill to master to help you research quickly and efficiently.

### Speed reading

It takes practice to get faster in reading. One way to do this is by making your eyes move forward, allowing them to stop only four, three, or two times, as you get faster along each line of text. Do not allow your eyes to go back at words you have read.

Another way to increase your speed in reading is to vary the speed. Like driving a car, which has different gears, read slowly and speed up, then slow again. It also stimulates your mind so that you concentrate more.

You could also try placing your finger or a pencil in the middle of the page, then moving it down following it with your eye. Your eye will “chunk” the information either side of the pencil/finger as you move downwards. This increases the amount of text you see as opposed to when you are reading in the standard fashion from left to right. The effect is to quickly give you the gist of what is on the page.

Things to help:

- Be selective about what you read
- Use coloured filters (even a plastic folder) to reduce glare
- Enlarge text if you are having trouble reading it on screen
- Try not to read aloud
- Practice!



### Evaluation

Whenever you read a text you should always be asking yourself if it provides answers to your questions – Who? Why? What? Where?

You must also ask questions about the content:

- Is the information what you **expected** to find? If not, check with other sources – if it is the same, you have found out something new!
- Is the information **accurate**?
- Is the information the **same** in different sources? (more likely to be accurate)
- Is the information **current** (up to date)? (although historical information may be what you need if you are looking at the development of an issue/topic)
- Is the information **opinion or fact**?
- Is the author likely to be **biased** for any reason?
- Is the information from a **primary** (where first published and contains original information) or **secondary** source (published in another source; not where it was first published, and where the information may have been altered)?



All of these methods of reading need practice, so the more you read, the easier it will get and you will improve your reading skills.