

## How can we help our students develop their reading speed?



This is 'Gizem'. Let's imagine she was one of my students last year. She asked pertinent questions in class when she needed clarification, she went home and reviewed what we'd done that day, and she would identify areas in her learning that she felt she needed to work on. I'd regarded Gizem as being quite a strong reader, this observation was based on her ability to read a number of texts and extract information from them to support her ideas in an essay.

So well had she done this that I felt moved to show her work to other teachers, who all agreed that her ability to read to a level whereby she could understand and extract ideas, in this particular instance at least, was fantastic. Consequently, I was somewhat surprised when she performed relatively poorly in reading exams. We discussed this problem in some detail.

She told me that she didn't feel that she had problems understanding the exam text, but that she didn't feel she could read it quickly enough to be able to answer the accompanying comprehension questions. I suggested that we work on her reading speed, as reading quickly is a different skill to reading for understanding. In order to help her, I also had to find out what she should be aiming for. When we think about increasing reading speed, what do we actually mean? How fast should she be trying to read? Consider this famous quote:

***'I took a speed-reading course and read War and Peace in twenty minutes. It involves Russia.'***

Woody Allen

Obviously, just reading faster and faster can defeat the purpose of the reading. In Woody's case, the extremely superficial level of understanding is not what people aim for when reading a novel. Knowing what level of understanding we are aiming for is absolutely key to matching it with an appropriate reading speed. One writer whose work with reading speed is not as well known as it should be is Ron Carver. Carver (1990) proposed five reading processes, each with a typical reading rate.

Reading process	Processing components	Target words per minute
Scanning	Lexical accessing	600
Skimming	Semantic encoding	450
Rauding	Sentence integrating	300
Learning	Idea remembering	200
Memorizing	Memorizing	138

When I was looking into the notion of increasing reading speed I was surprised to come across the term ‘rauding’ as I’d never heard of it before. Carver coined this term describing it as, ‘comprehension of all or almost all of the consecutively encountered thoughts during reading; comprehending about 75% or more of the complete thoughts encountered during the operation of the rauding process.’ When I looked through the suggested WPMs in the table above and thought about what Gizem and my other students need to do when answering comprehension questions during an exam. So, how to go about achieving 300 words per minute?

### Eyercize

Today we have looked at a tool that can help us: ‘Eyercize’. Here is a summary of how to use it: <http://youtu.be/l4qdnB43y-w>

### How does this relate to our curriculum objectives?

This is an extract from our reading objectives. As you can see, developing awareness of reading strategies is an objective at each level.

BASIC (≈A2+)	INTERMEDIATE (≈B1)	UPPER INTERMEDIATE (≈B2)
By the end of this level, students can read extracts from simple coherent texts on familiar topics of a concrete type which consist of mainly high frequency vocabulary.	By the end of this level, students can read coherent introductory texts on factual topics under study and can extract the overall meaning and locate relevant details when directed to do so.	By the end of this level, students can read independently in a university context, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources.
<b>BR1: AWARENESS RAISING</b>	<b>IR1: AWARENESS RAISING</b>	<b>UR1: AWARENESS RAISING</b>
1. Developing awareness of reading strategies for different text types	1. Developing awareness of different reading strategies for different text types <b>B</b>	1. Developing awareness of different reading strategies for different text types <b>BI</b>

### Further reading

Carver, Ronald P. (1990) *Reading rate: A review of research and theory*, Boston: Academic Press. ISBN: 0-12-162420-X

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(Adam 23 / 02 / 2012)