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Effective Reading Techniques To Enhance Communication Skills

Dr. Anjaneyulu Gangula

Professor & Dean Student Affairs

Sreyas Institute of Engineering and Technology, Nagole, Hyderabad

Abstract - This abstract probes various methods that facilitate active engagement with texts, including skimming, scanning. Skimming allows readers to grasp the main ideas quickly, while scanning targets specific information efficiently. Note-taking encourages deeper processing of content, aiding in the synthesis of knowledge and retention over time. Summarizing reinforces understanding by requiring readers to distill information into their own words. Advanced techniques, such as the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) method, further enhance learning by promoting critical thinking and structured review. By employing a combination of these strategies, readers can improve their overall reading efficacy, foster lifelong learning skills, and adapt to diverse reading contexts, from academic texts to digital content. This abstract serves as a foundation for educators and learners alike to explore and implement effective reading techniques that cater to individual needs and learning objectives.

keywords - Skimming - Scanning- Intensive - extensive reading- Active - Critical reading- SQ3R- Comprehensive reading-Real life reading-levels of reading-Real life reading

The way an individual reads is influenced by their specific goals or intentions. At a basic mechanical level, reading entails translating written symbols or words into spoken language or a mental equivalent. A deeper level of reading focuses on comprehending the literal meanings of the text, while an even more advanced level engages the reader with an active and proactive mindset.

Attention can now be directed toward various reading strategies. Readers often encounter unfamiliar words and complex or ambiguous sentences, but they can navigate these challenges without getting stuck. There are several strategies to tackle these obstacles. For example, readers can deduce the meanings of unknown words through context, word parts, or educated guessing. Additionally, they can utilize syntactic, logical, and cultural cues to interpret unfamiliar elements. When faced with difficulties related to relative clauses, embedded phrases, or intricate structures, it helps to first identify the fundamental parts of the sentence, namely the subject and verb. Readers should also pay attention to the mechanisms that create coherence within the text, such as references and linking words. A text consists of interconnected ideas rather than isolated sentences or clauses; these are introduced, reiterated, and connected throughout via references. If readers fail to grasp certain words, they may miss some facts and concepts. However, if they do not understand inter- or intra-sentential connectors, they might overlook the text's communicative purpose, as these words signal the function of subsequent content, such as a conclusion, an example, or a hypothesis. Thus, readers should remain vigilant for various markers.

Undoubtedly, reading is a vital skill at all stages of life, particularly for students, writers, executives, and administrators. It serves as a means of gathering information and broadening one's understanding and knowledge. Reading is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body; it connects individuals with great thinkers and keeps them informed about current events. Engaging with texts enhances one's values, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, writing proficiency, and stylistic abilities. Furthermore, reading fosters creativity, conceptual understanding, critical thinking, communication skills, and a broader perspective. The following techniques will prove beneficial for mastering effective reading.

Skimming

“Skimming” is a reading approach used to quickly review the content in order to identify specific information. It enables the reader to gain a general and superficial understanding of a text, providing an overarching view. This technique involves rapidly glancing through the material to capture the main ideas or structure of a chapter or article, which can assist in locating key information during a more detailed reading later.

Also referred to as getting the "gist" of the text, skimming is useful for:

- Reading reviews for products or services
- Reviewing a speech just before delivery
- Conducting quick research
- Briefly going through material before an exam

By skimming, you can identify key points without needing to fully comprehend the entire text, thus saving time if you need to revisit the material later for a more thorough understanding.

Scanning

Scanning is a method focused on locating specific pieces of information within a text. This technique involves swiftly glancing over the content to find certain details, such as names, dates, or locations. Scanning is commonly employed in everyday reading tasks that don't require deep comprehension.

Both skimming and scanning serve as essential techniques for efficient reading. While skimming provides a general idea of the text, scanning allows the reader to find particular details. A proficient reader often combines these techniques—for example, skimming to evaluate the importance of a text before reading it more carefully, and later scanning for specific information.

Intensive Reading

Intensive reading involves a detailed, time-consuming approach that ensures comprehensive understanding of the material. This technique typically requires slower reading rates, including reflection and analysis. It focuses on extracting specific information and uncovering deeper or symbolic meanings within the text. Intensive reading emphasizes accuracy and thoroughness; a slower reader often achieves a greater level of comprehension than a faster one. It has been said that careful reading of just one paragraph can enhance one's intellectual understanding, while superficially reading many books can leave a person uninformed.

Extensive Reading

In contrast, “extensive reading” is an enjoyable, leisurely form of reading, often referred to as free reading. This style allows readers to absorb content at a comfortable pace, primarily used for novels and recreational reading. During extensive reading, readers usually don't consciously apply specific techniques, as they are focused on enjoyment.

Active and Critical Reading

“Active and critical reading” techniques enhance retention and understanding of the material. If a reader finds themselves engrossed in a page but has absorbed nothing, they are not engaging actively. To practice active reading, one should ask questions throughout the process, contemplating the meaning of words, the significance of facts, and the author's intentions. Over time, this reflective process becomes a habitual part of reading.

The SQ3R Reading Method

Effective reading underscores the need for an active engagement with the material. To improve textbook reading skills, the **SQ3R** method can be particularly beneficial, comprising five key steps:

1. **Survey:** Gather preliminary information to orient your focus.
2. **Question:** Identify specific issues or problems that need answers.
3. **Read:** Find answers within the text, pausing periodically to assess your understanding of key points.
4. **Recite:** Reinforce memory retention by summarizing what you've learned in your own words.
5. **Review:** After completing the text, revisit the material to ensure comprehension and engage critically with the content.

The **SQ3R** approach might initially seem slow, but it is more efficient than passive reading, ultimately enhancing learning and retention.

Integration of Reading Techniques

These various reading methods are not mutually exclusive; real-life reading often requires a combination of techniques based on purpose. For example, a newspaper may be skimmed or scanned rather than read intensively, while a scholarly article may be engaged with more deeply for academic or personal enrichment. Works like Shakespeare's “Hamlet” or Milton's ‘Paradise Lost’ demand careful, intensive reading due to their complex nature.

Reading encompasses a range of skills including:

1. Understanding graphemes of a language
2. Mastery of the language itself
3. Interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary
4. Grasping explicit information
5. Inferencing implicit information
6. Comprehending conceptual meanings
7. Understanding the communicative functions of sentences
8. Analyzing relationships within and between texts

Additionally, readers benefit from a broad world knowledge, a clear purpose for reading, and a suitable reading style. Engaging with texts requires decoding and constructing meaning, which is influenced by individual experiences and expectations. Ultimately, effective reading is an active and dynamic process.

Readers should approach texts with an overall understanding before delving into detailed analysis, allowing them to recognize text organization—such as the placement of main ideas versus supporting details—which enhances reading efficiency. Developing skills such as inference, anticipation, and deduction can further enrich the reading experience.

The active nature of reading necessitates engagement with the text, including completing exercises related to the material and considering the author's perspective, intention, and tone for a holistic understanding. Meaning is subjective; readers bring their interpretations based on prior knowledge and expectations from the text.

Slow readers tend to stumble on unfamiliar words and fail to grasp the general meaning of the text. At the same time they must increase their speed of reading. However, the reading speed should not be developed at the expense of understanding of the text. One cannot read efficiently unless one can adopt one's reading speed and technique to one's aim when reading. This way one may become a confident and efficient reader. Predicting is not a reading technique but a skill basic to all the reading techniques.

Predicting is a faculty of guessing what is coming next based on grammatical, logical and cultural clues. This skill helps in anticipation and skimming. Previewing, unlike predicting, is a specific reading technique based on the table of contents, the appendix, the preface, the chapter and paragraph heading. These things will help in finding out where the required information can be located. Even the back cover helps. Previewing is useful in skimming and scanning.

To read any type of text first of all one needs motivation. Being motivated means that one reads a text expecting to find a number of things in it, including answers to some questions, some specific information and ideas. Certainly there is an interrelationship between the reader and the text. We may recall what Robert Southey said of books: "My never failing-friends are they, With whom I converse day by day".¹ There is no doubt that reading enriches and enhances one's knowledge, vision and wisdom. All the techniques of reading obviously help the reader understand a text by being aware of its function as determined by the writer. Therefore the reader must first of all try to know whether a text aims at convincing the reader, giving him some information or any other thing. The reader must also recognize the pattern of organization of a text. The first kind of organization is the one built around a main or central idea, which is then developed throughout the text. Sometimes the first paragraph sums up the main idea and the rest of the paragraphs consist of expansion of different kinds. There are also other kinds of organization, such as, chronological sequence, description, analogy and contrast, classification, argumentative and logical. Readers must also be wary of the order of elements in a sentence, that is, syntax. If the order is changed, meaning may change. The reader must also be able to discriminate fact from opinions. Besides identifying the intention or purpose and tone of a text, a reader must study the language used by the writer, his vocabulary and the use of images and the genre.

Generally, fluency is necessary in reading. It is the ability to read a text rapidly, smoothly, effortlessly and automatically with little conscious attention to the mechanics of reading. Skilled reading consists of the ability to read words automatically by sight. However, for different types of reading, a reader may vary his speed and similarly his rate of reading. There are four key steps for rapid reading. They are concentration, avoidance of regression, avoidance of sub-vocalizing and maximizing the eye-span. At one fix of the eye, a rapid reader can take in a breadth of the reading material. Maximizing the eye-span will enhance his comprehension of the text. There is a valid reason why rapid or fast reading is habit that must be adopted. Knowledge has been increasing at a great speed resulting in the publication of a large number of books, journals and articles every year, and millions of scientific and technical pages are printed annually. Students, teachers and scholars must learn not only to read these materials but also to read better and faster, maintaining at the same time a high level of comprehension. Academic material may be read and analyzed slowly and carefully with attention to each detail. But in view of the need to read vast amounts of materials relating to different fields of knowledge, researchers are of the opinion that very fast reading skills must be developed. Otherwise, it is not possible to cover or know what is in these materials. There is a belief that only a fast or rapid reader is an efficient and effective reader. In fact, there are different reading styles, such as, skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive

reading as already mentioned. The belief that only slow reading leads to effective comprehension is not valid. Researchers observe that a higher speed rate facilitates better understanding.

An efficient fast reader has the following qualities:

- (i) He does not move his head, eyes and a finger along the lines of the reading material.
- (ii) He does silent reading covering about eight hundred words a minute.
- (iii) He never pronounces words or rereads them for correct sounds, accent and intonation.
- (iv) He reads only to identify the main ideas, theme, avoiding details, descriptions and minor details.
- (v) He fixes a time limit and finishes his reading within this time limit displaying the power of his mind. He skims, scans and runs forward looking for main ideas only. Lack of sufficient time drives him to his emergency exercise.
- (vi) He will have developed a wide range of vocabulary to help him understand the author's ideas as he rushes forward.
- (vii) He develops an extensive reading habit so as to be able to speed up his reading
- (viii) He reads clusters or bunches of words at a time hopping from one bunch to another. He expands his eye-span and tries to accommodate more and more words in the bunches. He has knowledge of the grammar and structure of the language. He can grasp the meaning at a cursory glance. He has obviously a trained eye, a disciplined mind and an eager spirit.

However, a good reader is not necessarily a fast reader. He varies the speed of his reading to suit his purpose, as follows:

- (i) He adopts a slow pace of reading when the material is difficult and a high level of comprehension is required.
- (ii) He adopts an average speed of reading for magazines, newspapers and other routine materials.
- (iii) But a fast reader adopts a skimming and scanning strategy when his materials are not of a serious nature. Naturally, the level of comprehension is low, but he is not at loss because he succeeds in getting a global or universal idea of the text.

The reader's ability to understand a text is tested by his comprehension, interpretation and analysis of text on different topics and his own range of vocabulary. The reader must be able to answer the questions set on the texts. A knowledge of the roots, prefixes and suffixes will help in grasping the meanings of words. The following guides will help in answering the questions:

- (i) All the questions are based on the given text, and the answers also must be based on the text.
- (ii) The text must be skimmed first and the key terms must be noted.
- (iii) The first and the last sentences of each paragraph must be read first for a possible clue to the theme of the text.
- (iv) The whole passage must be read then making a note of the main points, important conclusions, names, definitions, places and numbers.
- (v) In case the meanings of some words are not understood, the nearest sentence must be read to grasp the contextual meanings of those words.
- (vi) A fair knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and roots helps in understanding the meanings of words.
- (vii) A knowledge of grammatical functions of words helps in identifying the synonyms and antonyms of words.
- (viii) The questions must be read first before identifying the answer choices.
- (ix) Correct answers must be identified by an elimination process.
- (x) One must read between the lines for implied meanings and views of the author.
- (xi) The reader must not get stuck over any one question or part of the passage.
- (xii) The answers must be brief and to the point.

It is clear that reading is thinking under the stimulus of the printed page. It is a psycholinguistic guessing game. There are four levels of reading, namely,

- (i) Reading the lines
- (ii) Reading between the lines
- (iii) Reading behind the lines, and
- (iv) Reading beyond the lines

Since reading is an active process, a reader can understand a text only when he actively puts to use his mental faculties. While reading, a reader interacts with a text, decodes it and constructs meanings in the process. What he constructs depends on not only what the writer writes but also on what the reader brings to the text. This intellectual soft skill is a challenging and profitable activity for a modern reader since modern textual material is mostly abstract and symbolic.

