

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

. . . on Appropriate Reading Speeds

By Bill Welker, EdD

What is an appropriate reading rate or speed for your child? To develop an affective reading pace, your child must first understand that all materials are not meant to be read in the same manner, nor are they meant to be treated alike. In essence, the proper reading speed for students depends generally on the following three factors:

1. What is the “purpose” for reading the textbook material? Is it to read for main ideas or specific details?
2. The “difficulty” of the textbook material read is another factor. Certainly, one would not read a physics textbook at the same rate as a literature textbook.
3. One’s “familiarity” with the content area textbook studied is another important aspect. If a student had no prior experience with chemistry, he or she would read the textbook material slowly to gain a knowledge base.

Now consider the types of reading rate strategies performed by the skilled textbook reader.

Actual Reading

Actual reading of textbooks involves a “word-for-word” analysis of the author’s main points, along with their associated details or facts. Still, as previously mentioned, not all reading materials are read in the same way.

Science, math or technical textbooks require slow, careful reading at rates of 50 to 150 words per minute. A moderate reading speed, say 250 to 300 words per minute, would suffice for printed materials found in magazines, newspapers and

social studies textbooks. Recreational literature would be read more rapidly from 350 to 500 words a minute. But whatever the speed, you are taking in every word during actual reading. Similarly, comprehension or understanding of the material read should be no lower than 80 percent.

Skimming

Skimming is used to find the “main ideas” of the textbook selection you are reading. When skimming chapters in textbooks, you should look at headings and subheadings. Likewise, read introductory, topic sentences and summary paragraphs at the end of chapters. This will give you the “big picture” regarding your textbook readings.

Total comprehension of the reading material would be around 60 to 70 percent. Moreover, the student-reader who has mastered this skill usually skims at rates of 800 to 1000 words a minute.

Scanning

Scanning is the fastest rate of textbook reading. It involves locating specific facts; so again, the student does not have to read everything on the printed page. In practice, it’s when the student knows the question and only wants to locate the answer quickly. A good example of everyday scanning is looking up a telephone number in the telephone directory.

In terms of learning, scanning is used in finding facts in a textbook chapter, table of contents and/or the index. The experienced scanner peruses about 1,500 words per minute and has 100 percent accuracy in answering the questions for which he or she is searching in the textbook.

Bad Habits

It also is possible that a student is a slow reader because of some poor physical reading habits. The following are the most common bad habits that will slow down reading rate:

- 1. *Moving your lips (sub-vocalization) while reading.*** To break this habit, just place a finger on your lips as you read. This will make you consciously aware of lip movement.
- 2. *Pointing at words when reading.*** To avoid this problem, you should hold both sides of the textbook with your hands or fold your arms while reading.
- 3. *Moving your head while reading.*** To eliminate this unnecessary movement, place your hand on your chin while reading.
- 4. *Reading one word at the time.*** You need to practice taking in small groups of words (two or three) with each glance of your eyes.

Breaking bad habits may be annoying at first, but with sincere effort on your part, these poor reading habits can be eliminated.

Most people labor under the notion that to understand and retain factual information, reading must be done slowly at all times. This is not true. Remember, reading rate depends on the type of material you are reading, your background knowledge of the material and your purpose for reading. Furthermore, you should understand that increasing reading speed, without equal emphasis on comprehension, won't get the job done. The two must go together.

In closing, you must stress with your child that improvement in reading rate will not take place over night. It's a gradual process that will reap many benefits if he or she practices on a daily basis and doesn't give up.

Parent Proverb

“The jealous are troublesome to others, but a torment to themselves.”

- William Penn

Next Month's Column: “Fact vs. Opinion: A Critical Reading Skill”

(Editor's Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia University College of Education and Human Services' *Jasper N. Deahl Honors Society* for career achievement and community involvement. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)