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RAPID READING, YES

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Rapid reading should be introduced into the college and high school English program. This subject would give students a tool of understanding and power that would have implications for their entire lives.

Rapid reading is a skill—like tennis, golf, or automobile driving. As a skill, its values transcend momentary mastery and application and extend into the student's life and personality. Armed with the power to read rapidly, a student is also given the ability to think logically, to outline and take notes more effectively, to write better, and to gain a feeling of accomplishment after each new reading experience.

Rapid reading is not a method that makes its practicer lose respect for the printed page as some claim. Rather, it makes the reader respect those things in print worthy of respect and place in proper perspective the trite, the banal, the obvious. Rapid reading is not geared to having students read Shakespearian sonnets at the speed of light. It is not a method that urges its adherent to dash mindlessly through a novel. It does not require special audio-visual machinery. It is not geared for only the bright, only the dull, only the middle intellectual groupings.

Adaptability and reasoning are the two pillars of rapid reading. Readers are taught to adjust themselves to the specific content being considered. Textbooks are read at a slower pace than newspapers and magazines, but the same reading attitude is applied.

Rapid reading breaks the word-by-word reading habit. It teaches students to ignore unimportant words such as articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. The basic structure of the written material is carefully analyzed. Reading focuses on the organization of the author's thoughts, and the more structured the reading is the more spectacular are the gains in reading rate.

The patterns of organization of reading matter are analyzed. Editorials in newspapers, signed columns, these are structured along the lines of presenting an opinion, supporting this with reasons, and concluding with some suggestion or exhortation. The typical textbook pattern, focusing as it does on aspects of information concerning subject matter, is another form of organization. Knowledge of how to read for this pattern adds greater speed and comprehension to the reading task.

The essential aspects of rapid reading as related to the high school or college reading program are as follows: (O S C A R S)

ORIENTATION: Material is swiftly looked over. The reading chore is sized up for length, difficulty, subject matter, and visual clues.

SELECTION: Major elements of the written material are perceived: aspects of subject matter, main thoughts about these aspects, details and illustrations supporting these main thoughts, implications concerning the entire reading passage.

CLARIFICATION: All of the above elements are clarified as the reader moves along attempting to follow the organization of the written material.

ARRANGEMENT: This step is a kind of mental note-taking. Arrangement takes place through questions: What is the pattern? What is the article about? (Subject)
What is the main thing said about the subject? (Gist)
What details support the Gist? (Details)
What is the point? (Significance)

Two optional steps of special value for the student are:

REVIEW: Material, quickly perceived, is now taken down in note form under these four headings: Subject Matter, Gist, Details, and Significance.

STUDY: Reading matter in its note form is now ready for study. All of the essential elements have been perceived and clarified.

The writer has omitted from this discussion any sensationalistic mention of statistics, such as the ability to read 700 words a minute, 1,000 words a minute, 2,000 words a minute. The gains in speed are impressive. But a statistic is not the goal, a headline is not the end product of rapid reading. The end result is a more intellectually aggressive, more mentally disciplined student—one who becomes sensitive to language, its wording, its content, and its structure.