

Intermediate Reading

Skimming

Session 4

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What Is Skimming?

Skimming is a form of rapid reading for finding the general idea—or gist—of a passage or a book. In your daily and academic life, you probably skim many things: movie reviews, newspaper articles, and passages and websites that might be useful for a research paper. Skimming is one of the tools you can use to read more in less time.

Skimming refers to looking *only* for the general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (or factual) material. With skimming, your overall understanding is reduced because you don't read everything. You read only what is important to your purpose. Skimming takes place while reading and allows you to look for details in addition to the main ideas. Skimming often refers to the way in which one reads at a faster rate to gain the general idea about the text without paying heed to the intentional and detailed meaning of the text.

For Example - When one reads the text only in order to understand the thesis statement, in one or two lines.

- Skimming is achieved by reading that text only which is considered to be relevant.
- Skimming requires a lower understanding of word recognition than compared to scanning.

Procedure - Read the introductory paragraph and the conclusion paragraph very carefully. You should search for headings and subheadings to get a good grasp of the idea.

When you skim, you have a general question in mind, something you need or want to know about the text, such as:

Skimming Questions

- What is the general meaning?
- Does this agree with what I already know about this subject?
- What is the writer's opinion?
- Will this information be useful to me?

Your eyes should move very quickly as you skim and should focus only on the words or sentences that will answer your questions. Often these are found in the beginning and ending paragraphs, and in the first sentences of the other paragraphs.

Skimming for Research

Skimming is especially useful when you need to do research, since it allows you to look quickly through lots of material to get a general idea of the content and to decide if it is relevant for your purposes.

How to skim

Many people think that skimming is a haphazard process placing the eyes where ever they fall. However, to skim effectively, there has to be a structure but you don't read everything. *What you read is more important than what you leave out.* So what material do you read and what material do you leave out?

Let's say you are doing research on a long chapter or a web site. By reading the first few paragraphs in detail, you will get a good idea of what information will be discussed. Once you know where the reading is

headed, you can begin to **read only the first sentence of each paragraph**. Also called *topic sentences*, they give you the main idea of the paragraph. If you do not get the main idea in the topic sentence or if the paragraph greatly interests you, then you may want to skim more.

At the end of each topic sentence, your eyes should drop down through the rest of the paragraph, looking for important pieces of information, such as names, dates, or events. Continue to read only topic sentences, dropping down through the rest of the paragraphs, until you are near the end. Since the last few paragraphs may contain a conclusion or summary, you should stop skimming there and read in detail. Remember that your overall comprehension will be lower than if you read in detail. If while skimming, you feel you are grasping the main ideas, then you are skimming correctly.

When to skim

Because skimming is done at a fast speed with less-than-normal comprehension, you shouldn't skim all the time. There are many times, however, when skimming is very useful.

Suppose you are taking a presentation skills class and have to deliver an oral report in a few days about the first computers ever made. You locate six books and four newspaper articles about this topic. Because you must be ready soon, you do not have time to read each word, but you need a large quantity of solid information.

Skimming will help you locate the information quickly while making sure you use your time wisely. It will also increase the amount of usable material you obtain for your research.

Suppose you have an exam in a few days. You need to review the material you learned, but you don't want to reread everything. By skimming, you

can quickly locate the information you haven't mastered yet and study only that material.

While reading, ask yourself the following questions to help you decide whether or not to skim. If you answer yes to any of these, then skimming is a useful tool.

- Is this material non-fiction?
- Do I have a lot to read and only a small amount of time?
- Do I already know something about this?
- Can any of the material be skipped?

If you have sufficient background knowledge or believe you don't need the information, then skip it! That's right—don't read it at all! Believe it or not, skipping material may sometimes be the best use of your time. Just because someone wrote something doesn't mean you have to read it. *If you pick and choose carefully what you skim and skip, you will be pleasantly surprised at the large amount of information you can get through in a short period of time.*

Source: <https://www.utc.edu/center-academic-support-advisement/center-college-student-success/academic-success/reading-tips-skim-scan.php>

Mikulecky, Beatrice S. and Linda Jeffries. (1998). *Reading power*. Second edition. NY: Pearson Education.