



## Skimming and Scanning

### Skimming and Scanning – What are they?

They are like a fourth gear – or overdrive – in reading, in which you read only enough of the material to give you the ideas or information you want or need.

### You mean there are four ways of reading?

There are probably more than four, but reading authorities acknowledge four distinctly different types.

One type is **careful reading**. This is the kind of reading you see when you're studying or reading complex material. You also use this type of reading when you're reading intensively and/or making decisions about the material you're reading, the author's purpose, or his skill in putting his message across.

Then there is what is called **usual reading**. This is your most habitual manner of reading. It's what you do when you read newspapers, magazines, or novels. You might also call it *casual reading*, for you're not hurrying, and you're not concerned with great depth of understanding. Most people read casually at about 250 to 300 words per minute, though better-than-average readers may have a usual rate of 500 to 600 words per minute.

A third gear is **accelerated reading**, which many people call speed-reading. In certain situations, because of lack of time and great quantities of material to cover, you have to alert yourself, read aggressively, and try to maintain a much higher rate than your usual rate. This demands a greater expenditure of energy than most people can maintain for long periods of time, so you use this third gear only occasionally, when the situation demands.

And then there's the fourth gear – **skimming and scanning**. Skimming and scanning are the same as accelerated reading. In accelerated reading, you still try to read everything, but at a high rate. In skimming and scanning, you deliberately look for certain parts, and you skip over a great deal of the material.

Isn't it better to read fast than to skim and scan? Not necessarily. Sometimes you don't have the time to read, even very quickly. At other times, the material isn't worth your time. In other situations, you don't need all of the information; you just need certain facts. For example, you wouldn't read a telephone directory to get one number or a dictionary to look up one word. You wouldn't read an entire text to find one idea, an entire book before deciding to take it out of the library, or a magazine before buying it. There are situations in which you'd be very likely to use skimming and scanning.

What is the difference between skimming and scanning? They're alike in that you don't read all of the material. They're different in the way you go about each.

In *scanning*, you usually have a question to, or something specific to look for. It might be a telephone number, a particular quotation in a book, or supporting facts to use in a discussion you're having. When you scan, your goal is to find just the information you want. When you've found it, you're finished reading.

In *skimming*, your purpose is quite different. You may be interested in the "gist" of an article, or you may want to sample a book in the library before deciding to take it out. When you skim, you alternate read and glance, and your goal is to obtain an impression of the whole.

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# Skim / Scan / Close Reading

**Skim:** glancing through a reading selection to get a sense of the topics and important ideas.

## Examples

- Newspaper: reading only titles of the articles
- Textbook: reviewing the table of contents or “chapter-at-a-glance” feature

**Scan:** to look systematically at a reading selection to find specific information

## Examples

- Newspaper: look specifically at the movie section to see what time a show starts at a local theatre
- Recipe: search through the ingredient list for specific information

**Close Reading:** closely reading every word in a text for accurate comprehension

## Examples

- Product Manual: reading the operating instructions for a digital camera
- Computer Game Instructions: reading the rules and guidelines for play