

SKIMMING

PURPOSE:

To determine trends or broad generalizations. Many times in our reading experiences, a line by line approach is not necessary for our purposes. It may be that a knowledge of general trends or broad generalizations is all that is necessary for the amount of comprehension desired, or perhaps one only needs a quick brush up or review before a recitation. During pre-reading activities, such as previewing or surveying a chapter, one does not read line by line; neither does one do this when one is attempting to find an article in a magazine or journal.

TECHNIQUE:

The most practical procedure to meet your needs is skimming. Skimming is, as the name suggests, allowing one's eyes to travel quickly over a page, stopping only here and there to gain ideas. There are three kinds of places to stop in order to make skimming efficient.

1. **Headlines:** First of all, one should stop at the headlines on the page. These are sub-headings, titles of paragraphs, or other spots that stand out on the page. These headings are like the signs a driver meets along the highway. They give him facts about upcoming sections of the road. The signposts in reading let the reader know what is going to be discussed in each section or paragraph. Italicized words and other techniques are used to make the statement stand out, thus giving further information about the material.
2. **Main Ideas:** Between sub-headings, there are several paragraphs indicating several main ideas. These are the next sign posts that one should look for. Main ideas are usually presented in the first or second sentence, called a topic sentence, where the author tells us what he is going to say in the paragraph. In the last sentence, he usually sums up what he has already said. If one reads these headings and the first and last sentences, one can usually understand what the main idea of the paragraph is. Then one can decide whether he/she would like to read further to find out more details or see how the author has proven his main idea.
3. **Key Words:** Sometimes, when we read a heading or a topic and summary sentence, we decide we must read further in that section in order to fully satisfy ourselves. We can still do this by skimming.

This time, we will look for the third signpost, key words found within the body of the paragraph. These are words such as: **First, Finally, Therefore, and However**. Many authors use such words to set off the facts that they are going to present. We can look through a paragraph quickly for these cues. Other key words, such as: **In spite of, In addition to, On the other hand, and In the first place**, are also helpful.

In skimming, then, we look first at the title or heading of each section. The heading gives us the general idea of what will be discussed. Then, we read the first and perhaps the last sentence of each paragraph. This will usually give us the author's main ideas. Finally, if we want to find out more, we quickly look through the paragraph for key words and the facts next to them.

Skimming is also helpful when we need to find out something about an unfamiliar book. When we approach a new textbook or a volume on a library shelf that attracts our attention, we can quickly gain at least a passing acquaintance by some simple skimming techniques. For example, the title page gives us the author's name, the book title, and on the back, the copyright date. The preface will give us information about the author and will help us relate this book to some particular field. A quick look at the table of contents will help us form some idea about the general topics and the author's organization of his materials. If we wish to know if the author defines his terms, we will look for a glossary in the back. If we want to see if the author lists any of the background data from which he wrote his book, we will look for and study the appendix. If, by this time, we think that the book has any pertinent information, we can check the index to find the pages on which the material is located. This simple skimming technique will not only help us to get an overview of a book we are about to study, but it will also save us time and effort in choosing a book on a particular subject from the library.