

Skimming and scanning are reading techniques that use rapid eye movement and keywords to move quickly through text for slightly different purposes. **Skimming** is reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the material. **Scanning** is reading rapidly in order to find specific facts.

What Is Skimming?

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.

You hone in on what is important to your purpose.

Skimming takes place while reading and allows you to look for details in addition to the main ideas.

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 Material to Leave Out When Skimming?

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.

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.

What Is Scanning?

Scanning is another useful tool for speeding up your reading. Unlike skimming, when **scanning**, you look *only* for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything.

You scan when you look for your favorite show listed in the cable guide, for your friend's phone number in a telephone book, and for the sports scores in the newspaper.

For scanning to be successful, you need to understand how your material is structured as well as comprehend what you read so you can locate the specific information you need.

Scanning also allows you to find details and other information in a hurry.

How to Scan

Because you already scan many different types of material in your daily life, learning more details about scanning will be easy.

Establishing your purpose, locating the appropriate material, and knowing how the information is structured before you start scanning is essential.

The material you scan is typically arranged in the following ways: alphabetically, chronologically, non-alphabetically, by category, or textually.

Alphabetical information is arranged in order from A to Z, while **chronological** information is arranged in time or numerical order.

Information can be also be arranged in **non- alphabetical** order, such as a television listing, or by **category**, listings of like items such as an auto parts catalog.