

GEARING UP YOUR READING EXPERIENCE



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I often find people uninterested in reading. And if I do find fellow readers, I often hear complaints about reading issues, mentioning that they could read for hours during younger years. This might be a sign that you think it's a chore and reading inefficiently, and I hope to help you overcome that.

PART ONE: THE DEATH OF HARD-EARNED DOPAMINE

Dopamine = happiness hormone (a heavily simplified explanation). Reading is hard-earned dopamine. With more easily digestible media (social media in particular), our brains don't want to earn dopamine through work. We have easy excuses to jump into a sea of dopamine. Worst part is, like fools, we dive in headfirst.

Why mention this? Because this might be a significant reason you feel reluctant or find it difficult to read, consciously or otherwise. The next part is dedicated to overcoming this obstacle.

PART TWO: THE SWORD AND WHETSTONE

"The mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge" – Tyrion Lannister, A Song of Ice and Fire. So, how can we put these whetstones to use?

"The sword only retains its edge if it is constantly sharpened and cared for" – me, after reading Tyrion's awesome quote. So, first thing's first: PRACTICE. It doesn't have to be for hours. Instead of waking up to social media, why not read for 15 minutes? Before sleeping, why not get another 15 minutes in? Doing that daily adds up to 15 hours of reading per month. Moreover, average reading speed is 200-250 words per minute. Pages usually have 250-500 words (but those are ballpark numbers). With two minutes per page, you get about 15 pages a day – a WHOPPING average of 5,475 pages per year. Quick maths.

Once you get routine and focus down, the next step is learning to speed-read. This will help to get rid of bad reading habits that slow you down a LOT, such as reading in your head (subvocalisation) or going back to re-read something that you

already read because you think you missed something. These habits come from childhood, so naturally, many people might still have trouble with them. The next four paragraphs will give you some simplified insight on how to achieve speed-reading.

First, read with your finger. This will train your eyes to focus better, help adjust your speed (both fast and slow), and kill subvocalisation (because no one wants to read at 150 words per minute only) and pointless re-reading.

Second, remove your finger and start reading with only your eyes. This might be difficult, considering that walls of text are distracting, so I recommend using "tunnel vision" to block out whatever is written on the page EXCEPT for EXACTLY what you're reading. Focus more on the "focusing on what you're reading" portion of this exercise because you'll automatically start blocking out stuff once your eyes learn to pay attention to only what you're reading.

Third, INCREASE YOUR VOCABULARY. Comprehension is a key part of reading fast (and so is not looking at the dictionary seven times per page).

Finally, speed-reading leaves more room for imagination, and more room for imagination complements speed-reading. Regardless, imagining so many things can be hard, so here are a few ways you can fix that too:

Form the background – what scene is the book taking you into?

Specifics – if something is being described, imagine things one at a time before looking at the whole picture.

References – look at pictures or read comics.

Relatability – put yourself in the shoes of the characters involved.

As it shows, reading can be tough on the brain, so try to reward yourself with more easily digestible media (like an episode of a show). This way, the next time you read, in expectation of the "reward", your brain will be less likely to process reading so negatively. In fact, if all goes well, you can even remove the reward at

some point and your brain will still view reading as an enjoyable experience.

As a bonus, please consider using various media (paperbacks, e-books, audiobooks, etc.) to get even more reading done.

My point is that it doesn't matter – easily digestible media exists, and you can just go gorge on that. However, I honestly

believe that there's nothing quite like the feeling you get after finishing a series of hallucinations over a stack of pages. No harm giving it a whirl, eh?

Rasheed Khan is a hug monster making good music but terrible puns and jokes where he's probably the only one laughing. Ask him how to pronounce his name at aarcvard@gmail.com



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