READING RATE FLEXIBILITY

When a student asks, "How can I improve my speed of reading?":

Experts in the field of reading usually answer that a skilled reader has not just one single speed but several different speeds. Far from reading everything at the same rate, they shift according to their purpose at the moment, the difficulty of the material, and their familiarity with the subject matter.

Your "collection" of reading speeds should include:

- **A skimming rate** - which can be 1,000, 2,000 or more words per minute.
- **A very rapid reading rate** - perhaps 500 to 600 words per minute.
- **A rapid rate** - perhaps 350 to 500 words per minute.
- **An average rate** - perhaps 250 to 350 words per minute.
- **A slow and careful rate** - from 250 down to 100 words per minute or slower for something like a chemistry textbook.

You need to "size up the reading task," then select the appropriate reading rate.

- **A skimming rate** should be used for:
  1. locating a reference or new material.
  2. answering a specific question.
  3. getting the general idea of a selection.

- **A very rapid reading rate** should be used for:
  1. reviewing familiar material.
  2. reading a light novel or fast-moving short story for its plot.

- **A rapid rate** should be used for:
  1. reading fiction of moderate difficulty for characterization, mood, sensory imagery, or anticipation of outcome.
  2. reading easy non-fictional material in order to find the main idea, to make generalizations, or to note sequence.