

Top 5 Ways to Skim Effectively

TAKE A PICTURE. When you walk into a room you do not immediately notice the details – a specific picture, a lamp shade, the pattern of the rug – you first take in the ENTIRE room and then you focus on the details. You must do the same with the non-fiction readings. The only way to do this in a speedy fashion is to SKIM first and then FOCUS on the details. Our eyes automatically do this when we walk into a room, but our eyes do not automatically do this when we read a passage. Therefore, our eyes/brain need to be trained and training takes time. The following 5 strategies will not be mastered quickly; instead, you must actively practice these strategies over the course of months for the mental snapshot to become routine.

The picture you need to create is a MAP of the passage: WHAT the passage is about, WHERE it is going, and WHEN you will need to slow down or speed up.

Below are 5 ways to create a MAP of a passage before you focus on the road:

1. Constantly focus on the General Map rather than specific places. Ask yourself these 3 questions as you read:
 - What is the main idea (claim)?
 - What is the tone?
 - Is this information important?
2. Focus on beginnings and endings
 - Think of yourself as a train: Start slowly (read the introduction carefully), speed up in the middle (skim the less significant supporting details), and finish slowly (read the conclusion carefully).
 - The main idea is established in the introduction and finalized in the conclusion. It's essential to know the main idea to answer questions effectively and quickly.
 - Topic sentences and concluding sentences establish the main idea of the paragraph. Oftentimes they summarize all you need to know!
 - Topic sentences also provide the WHERE you are going.
 - The conclusion provides the destination – where you are ending up.
3. Thought reversers, names, dates, and interesting punctuation: Know the road signs that tell you WHEN to slow down and focus.
 - **Birthday words** – but, instead, rather, however, despite, although, yet – tell you when there is a shift in evidence or direction as well as emphasize the key points. The main idea is often found FOLLOWING these birthday words.
 - **Interesting punctuation** – colons, dashes, quotation marks – tells you when authors are drawing conclusions, offering supportive evidence, and emphasizing key points. In addition, dashes and semi-colons often come before birthday words, making them especially important to look out for.
 - **Names, Dates, Strange Words** – circle all of these. This helps with “mapping” the passage and knowing where to look if these names, dates, or strange words appear in a question.
4. Know when to speed up and slow down
 - It's not necessary to read in complete sentences. Read the start of a sentence with an eye to whether it will yield useful information. If not, skip rest of sentence.
 - Skip examples and proofs – come back if a question requires you to read them.
5. Read Vertically rather than Horizontally
 - Horizontally (side to side) when reading introductions/topic sentences/conclusion and ideas after thought-reversers (birthday words)
 - Vertically (down the page) when reading the middle of a body paragraph

(Use your pencil to guide your eyes – move pencil side to side for the horizontal and zigzag for the vertical)