Skimming and scanning

Skimming is reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the material. **Scanning** is reading rapidly in order to find specific facts.

Skimming

- Helps you read more quickly

- Helps you decide if the text is interesting and whether you should read it in more detail

Scanning

- Helps you find specific information quickly

- Helps you find specific words or numbers quickly

How do skimming and scanning differ?

- You skim a text to obtain the **gist** - the overall sense - of a piece of writing. This can help you decide whether to read it more slowly and in more detail.

- You scan a text to obtain specific information. For example, skimming is useful for finding a particular number in a telephone directory.

Sometimes you can use **both** reading methods. After you've skimmed a piece of text to decide whether it's of interest, you might then use scanning techniques to find specific information.

How do you skim read?

- Read the title, subtitles and subheadings to find out what the text is about.

- Look at the illustrations to give you more information about the topic.

- Read the first and last sentence of each paragraph.

- Don't read every word or every sentence. Let your eyes skim over the text and look out for key words.

- Continue to think about the meaning of the text.

How do you read scan?

- Do not try to read every word. Instead let your eyes move quickly across the page until you find what you're looking for.

- Use clues on the page, such as headings and titles, to help you.

- In a dictionary or phone book, use the header words to help you scan. You can find these in bold type at the top of each page.

- If you're reading for study, start by thinking up or writing down some questions that you want to answer. Doing this can focus your mind and help you find the facts or information that you need more easily.

- When sitting for an exam, read the questions first to identify keywords. Then, scan the text for the keyword(s).

[Let's practice skimming and scanning](#)