

“The Speed of Reading” Handout
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Recommended Reading

Honoré, C. (2004). *In praise of slow: How a worldwide movement is changing the cult of speed*. Vintage Canada.

Honoré’s interest in the Slow Movement began with slow reading. One day in an airport he spotted a newspaper article on a series of condensed fairy tales called *The One-Minute Bedtime Story*. At first it struck him as brilliant — the cure to his nightly tug-of-war with his son’s demands for more stories — then the absurdity of his fast lifestyle called him to his senses.

Miedema, J. (2009). *Slow reading*. Duluth, MN: Litwin Books.

Nardi, B. and O’Day, V. (1999) *Information ecologies: Using technology with heart*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Libraries are a clear example of an information ecology, with books, magazines, DVDs, and computer terminals. It also has librarians for whom access to information of all kinds for all people is a core value. Libraries house a complex range of information activities, be that story time for two-year-olds, a poetry recitation by a local author, or a podcasting workshop. It is no wonder that libraries have thrived through the digital age. They are one of the few places that respond to the complexity of our information needs.

Nell, V. (1988). *Lost in a book: The psychology of reading for pleasure*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Nell observes that as reading rate drops, readers tend to subvocalize, a motor activity of the tongue that mimics eating. “As with a morsel, so with a phrase: rolling it on the tongue for longer than mastication requires extracts its full flavour and nutritive value” (99).

Nielsen, J. (1997). How users read on the Web. *Alertbox*. Retrieved from <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>.

The first sentence in the report is, “They don’t.” Seventy-nine percent of their test users always scanned the page, picking out words and sentences rather than reading word by word.

Prose, F. (2006). *Reading like a writer*. NY: HarperCollins.

Prose was concerned that many of her students found reading stressful. In her view, close reading provides a way around this stress. We all begin as close readers, she says, learning to read by listening word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, to those reading to us.

Ross, C. S., McKechnie, L. (E.F.) & Rothbauer, P. M. (2006). *Reading matters: What the research reveals about reading, libraries, and community*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Ross suggests it is a misunderstanding of youth to dismiss online reading as an enemy of reading. She argues for an expanded definition of reading, including everything from the serious scholar to the gamer with a digital help file.

Sellen, A. J., & Harper, R. H. R. (2001). *The myth of the paperless office* (1st ed.). The MIT Press.

The historical timing of inventions does not always correspond to the brilliance and importance of the same. Print led to digital text, much like the wheel led to the automobile. Sometimes we forget how much of modern life depends on these old technologies. Print enlists the hands in the act of reading, signalling the brain where to read next, and how much more there is to read. Digital reading shifts all the work to the eyes. Sellen and Harper observe that print is still the best medium for many purposes, including conceptual design, editing, proofreading, sensing the flow of text, and finally as a tangible bound object: “Ultimately, we want a bound volume in hand – a physical product that testifies to our efforts and that we can hand to family, friends, and colleagues” (1).

Wolf, M. (2007). *Proust and the squid: The story and science of the reading brain*. NY: HarperCollins.

We should not be too quick to label slowness as a negative thing. Perhaps evolution will make us faster readers, but Wolf disagrees with futurists who think that acceleration is always positive: “In music, in poetry, and in life, the rest, the pause, the slow movements are essential to comprehending the whole. Indeed, there are 'delay neurons' whose sole function is to slow neuronal transmission by other neurons for milliseconds” (213-214).