

Skimming and Scanning

Reading Comprehension Strategy

Skimming and Scanning are rapid reading strategies that can be used to glance at a text looking for particular information, particularly in large bodies of information when it is unnecessary to retain all of it.

Skimming is used to get the most important information or the gist of a text. When skimming, we read the entire text and take note of different components such as headings, pictures and charts. However, it is not essential to understand every word to understand the overall meaning of a text. We use skimming strategies when quickly skim-reading newspapers, magazines and webpages.

Scanning is another reading technique where you want to find information quickly. However, scanning involves having a particular question in mind. Therefore, you 'scan' a text looking for particular information, words or ideas and disregarding unrelated information. Examples include reading a bus timetable or reading the results of an internet search.

Suggested Learning Outcomes

R2: Read for a variety of purposes: learning, pleasure, research, comparison.

R3: Use a wide range of reading comprehension strategies appropriate to texts, including digital texts: to retrieve information;... follow a process or argument, summarise, link main ideas;...

Possible Key Skills

- Being literate
- Managing information and thinking

Instructions

It is important to highlight the fact that skimming and scanning are not always appropriate strategies to use when reading texts but they are useful to use when seeking out particular information from a text or when reading material under time constraints. Skimming and Scanning are not substitutes for a thorough reading and are most suitable for locating information quickly. Overall comprehension will be lower than if a text is read in detail. These strategies are usually most suitable for informational or non-fiction texts.

When to use Skimming: to quickly locate relevant sections from a large quantity of written material. Skimming is especially useful when there are few headings or graphic elements to gain an overview of a text.

When to use Scanning: to quickly locate specific information from a large quantity of written material.

Skimming involves reading quickly to get the main idea of a text.

There are many cues or indicators to watch out for when skimming a text.

- note any bold print, tables, charts or images
- start at the beginning of the text and skim your eyes over the text very quickly
- you might read a few words of every paragraph, perhaps the first and last sentences. Reading topic sentences (usually the first sentence of a paragraph) can be an effective way of understanding the main idea of a paragraph
- the aim is to get an overview of the key words and points in a text without all the details.

Scanning involves scanning your eyes over part of a text to find specific pieces of information.

- after gaining an overview and skimming, identify the section(s) of the text that you probably need to read.
- start scanning the text by allowing your eyes (or finger) to move quickly over a page.
- as soon as your eye catches an important word or phrase that you were searching for, stop reading
- you then slow down to read the relevant section more thoroughly.