READ SMARTER, NOT FASTER

How a non-traditional library workshop caused us to reimagine library instruction

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Workshop Request

Coordinator of Graduate Education Programs requested:
"I coordinate workshops for engineering graduate students. The students are requesting that I host a **workshop on reading retention/speed reading**."

Further clarification yielded:
"Engineering students need to read a lot of journal articles, so they just want to be able to **read faster and remember what they read better.**"

Designing the Workshop

Workshop Title: Speed Reading and Reading Retention

Scholarly literature on speed reading

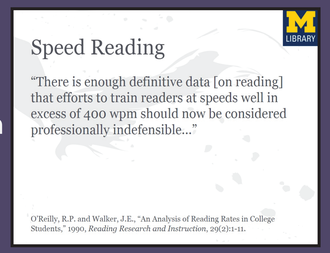
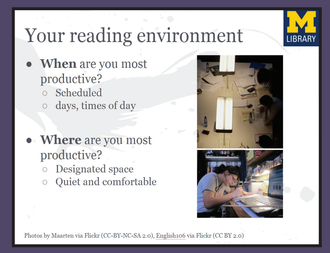
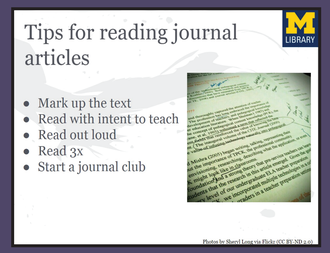
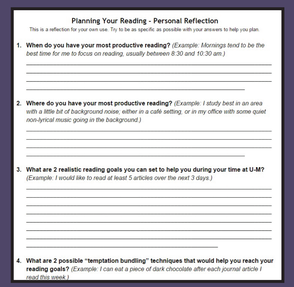
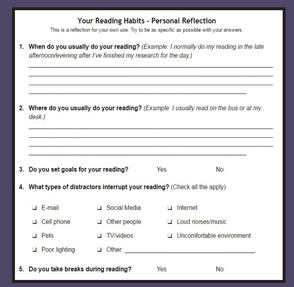
- "There is enough definitive data [on reading] that efforts to train readers at speeds well in excess of 400 wpm should now be **considered professionally indefensible**."[1]
- "Reading speeds higher than 300-400 words per minute are the **result of skimming, not careful reading.**"[2]

Initial Topic vs. Final Topics

Speed reading

- **Speed reading resources**
- **Reading retention skills:**
  - **Study habits**
  - **Setting up your reading environment**
- **Tips for reading journal articles**

Delivering the Workshop

	Speed reading	Reading retention	Tips for reading journal articles
Presentation			
Activities	**Your Reading Habits** 	**Planning Your Reading** 	**Reading a Journal Article** 
Discussion	• Where do you read most often? Why? • What types of distractors interrupt your reading?	• Where do you have your most productive reading? • When do you have your most productive reading?	• How did you mark-up the article? • What order did you read the article?

By the Numbers: **61 graduate student attendees | 14 engineering departments | 90 minute workshop**

Assessing the Workshop

Post-workshop survey (April 2015)

- 85% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the **workshop was useful and informative**
- Students **liked the variety of topics** presented (study habits, managing journal articles, etc.)

BUT...
they still wanted to be taught how to speed read

N = 26 students (43% response rate)

Survey one year after workshop (April 2016)

- **61% of students feel more confident** in: 1) knowing when and where they read most effectively and 2) knowing how their physical and emotional state affects their reading
- **Only 19% of students reported a change** in how they manage journal articles

N = 26 students (43% response rate)

Changes to future iterations of the workshop:

1. **Retitle the workshop: "Reading Research Papers for Maximum Efficiency and Retention"**
2. **Focus more on fundamental reading habits and focus less on speed reading**

Impact on Instruction

Some colleagues questioned our decision to instruct this workshop, believing that it doesn't fall within the purview of library instruction.

We respectfully disagree.

This workshop is within the purview of library instruction because it:

- **Supports the instructional and research activities on campus**, a core tenet of our library's mission statement
- **Satisfies an unmet need** (due to the large number of attendees and positive assessment)
- Provides a unique opportunity to **connect with traditionally infrequent library users** (engineering graduate students)

U-M College of Engineering has 3,331 graduate students across 16 departments

Lessons Learned

- There's no perfect combination of speed reading & reading retention
- It's important to align student and instructor expectations *before* the workshop
- Creating a diverse instruction team brings different strengths and expertise
- Long-term assessment can yield more nuanced data about the impact of the workshop

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References

1. O'Reilly, R.P. and Walker, J.E., "An Analysis of Reading Rates in College Students," 1990, *Reading Research and Instruction*, 29(2):1-11.

2. Nation, P., "Reading Faster," 2009, *International Journal of English Studies*, 9(2):131-144.