

# Speed reading course helps . . .

By RHONDA WATTERS  
Battalion Reporter

Miss Munuzzo, can you ever forgive me?

Good old Miss Munuzzo-my first grade teacher. She taught me everything I know about reading. And now after 15 years of loyalty to her teaching, I go against all the good reading habits she taught me.

Well, Miss Munuzzo, it's not my fault. If you're going to blame anyone, it will have to be Evelyn Wood.

After years of listening to ads, glancing at flyers and wondering how those people on TV could read as fast as they turned the pages, my curiosity got the best of me and there I sat in a free introductory speed reading lesson. And in spite of everything Miss Munuzzo taught me, I was, heaven forbid, even reading with my hands.

I admit I was skeptical about going to the lesson. After laughing over Cheech and Chong's "Evelyn Woodhead sped redding course" routine, I felt the whole idea was kind of silly.

My friends didn't help much either. When I sat wondering out loud about the methods that could make a person read that fast, they offered constructive suggestions such as .45 magnums, leveled at the head, or electric cattle prods, while yelling "Faster, faster!"

The introductory lesson was in the banquet room of a local hotel. It was given by a pleasant-looking young man who said he was a full-time law student who traveled around one month of the year promoting Evelyn Wood.

In spite of my skepticism, I had

to admire his approach. He started the lesson off by answering the two questions that were in everyone's mind: Did the course work, and how much did it cost?

After explaining about the background and development of speed reading, and giving the details of a money-back guarantee, he told the audience the special student price: \$325.

An unnatural hush fell over the class and judging by the looks on some of the faces and the several low whistles, I decided there were probably some people there with bank accounts as low as mine. By the looks of one face, maybe even lower.

But no one got up to leave and after letting the cost sink in, the instructor started reciting what the Evelyn Wood course had done for him.

He said he had taken the speed reading course while he was still in high school. It had improved his grades and left him with enough extra time to work 20 additional hours a week at his part-time job.

He said he continued to use his reading skill throughout college and after graduating, obtained a real estate brokers license (that can take several years of study), in only six weeks.

Now, he said, he was a full-time law student and a part-time real estate broker and speed reading, of course, was responsible for much of his success.

Impressed, but still skeptical about the smoothness of the talk, I decided to reserve judgment until the lesson and see what speed

reading could do for me.

Before showing us the first method, the instructor tested our reading so each of would know our present reading speed.

According to the statistics he recited, one-third to one-half of a person's reading time is spent in-between lines. He said that all that time was wasted and we were going to learn how to use some of it.

First, we were to forget what we learned in grade school (poor Miss Munuzzo) and start following our reading with our fingers.

After getting used to that and getting over the guilt of using our hands when we've been told all our life not to, we had to quickly jerk our finger back from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. Since the eye naturally follows movement, this cut down on the time spent from one line to another.

We practiced that for a little while, then tested our speed again.

I have to admit I was impressed. A fairly fast reader to begin with, I increased my speed from 560 words per minute to 740, and still kept my comprehension.

After explaining about possible ways of financing the course, the instructor then told us how we could sign up. Out of the 23 people that attended, slightly less than half enrolled for the class.

In spite of Cheech and Chong, Miss Munuzzo and my friends, I had seen for myself. I came away from the lesson satisfied that the class really can improve one's reading speed.

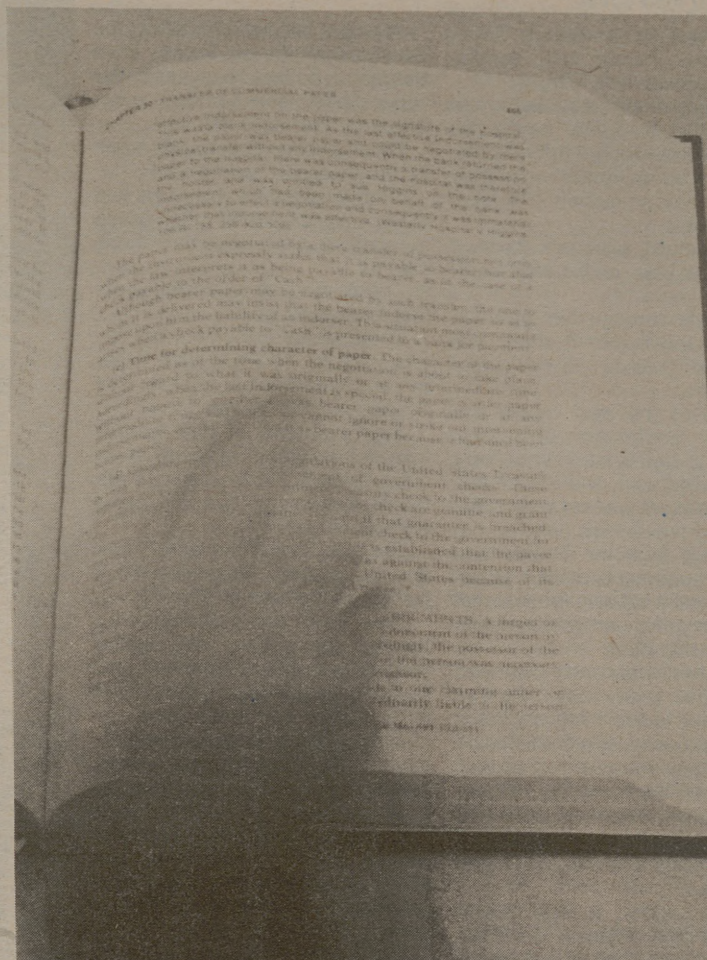


Photo by Lee Roy Leschper Jr.

Speed reading, as taught by Evelyn Wood, means jerking the finger back to the next line so as not to lose time spent in between lines.

## . . . but it has its drawbacks

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Although speed reading can be a useful skill, according to a Texas A&M reading specialist, it may not be all it claims to be.

Some of the advertising or speed reading courses are misleading and unrealistic, said Joseph Ilika, associate professor in the Curriculum and Instruction Department.

"These claims of 6,000 words a minute, I wish they were true," he said. "It would be a wonderful compliment to our public school system."

Ilika, a reading teacher since 1959, has done research on the

subject, including experiments, research papers and speed reading advertisements, many from the Bryan College-Station area.

"It takes time to improve reading," he said. "For people who have good basic reading skills, speed reading can be of some help. But to people who are weak in these skills, it can be a disaster."

Because the mind can only process about 350 words a minute, Ilika said when people make claims of reading thousands of words a minute, they are actually scanning or skimming.

Scanning is reading to find a single fact or bit of information without reading everything. Skim-

ming is reading to grasp main ideas, not details.

In Bryan-College Station, there are several different speed reading courses taught.

One course uses machines to increase reading speed. The machines, such as a "T-bar" that travel down the page forcing the reader to keep up, are designed to change eye movements.

Nancy Womack, who headed the U.S. Army's reading program in Berlin two years ago, is the owner of a firm that teaches such a course.

"We retrain how the eye moves," she said. "In the normal reader the eye makes a 'hit' on

every single word. To get high speeds, you take in several words as a group."

Evelyn Wood, which is taught nation-wide, uses a method that does not utilize machines. It claims the machines become a crutch and that the eyes can be trained without them.

Dee Harris, a pre-vet student here, took one of the courses that uses the machine method.

"For pleasure reading it was great," she said, "but I couldn't use it that much for technical reading."

Dr. William C. Harrison, professor of Journalism here, said he took one of the nation-wide courses in 1969.

Harrison said he became bored with reading, even though his reading speed was increased.

"It took the joy out of reading and made it hard work," Harrison said. "I would not recommend it for someone who reads fairly fast."

Wesley Duffard, a Texas A&M student who took the same nation-wide course more recently, said he increased his speed somewhat but not enough for what it cost.

One big question about speed reading courses is whether comprehension goes down as speed goes up. Most advertising claims comprehension either improves or stays the same.

According to Ilika, as speed increases, comprehension can increase only to a certain point, then will begin to go down.

It varies with different people, he said, but anyone wanting to increase his speed should find a point where comprehension and speed are somewhat balanced.

Though some speed reading courses may not increase word speed as much as advertised, they are teaching better study methods and skills as part of the class, Ilika said.

These courses could be valuable, he said, because few students have good study habits or even know how to study at all.

For anyone wanting to improve their reading and study skills without taking a speed reading course, Ilika recommends several books that can help.

"Making Better Readers," by Ruth Strang and Dorothy Kendall Bracken, had these suggestions.

—SKIM: Any directory, dictionary or material that will yield a specific answer; easy simple material such as newspapers or fiction; study material that must be organized before careful reading.

—SCAN: Any material in which main ideas and supporting facts are to be picked up, such as easy textbooks, magazines and stories.

—STUDY READ (slow): Textbooks, technical articles; any material that requires remembering specific details.

—CAREFUL AND REFLECTIVE READING: Material such as how-to directions; any work that contains great thoughts; technical experiments; poetry.

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