READING

How to Compute Words Per Minute

1. After have chosen a passage in a book or article, count the total number of words in any three lines. Divide the total by three. Round it off to the nearest whole number. This will give the average number of words per line.

2. Count the number of lines in the article or book (or on one page if it is longer than one page). Multiply the number of words per line by the total number of lines. This will give you a fairly accurate estimate of the total.

3. As you read, time yourself. Record both minutes and seconds of your starting time (4:20). Start reading when the second hand of the clock reaches twelve. Record your finishing time. Subtract your starting time from your finishing time.

4. Divide the total reading time into the total number of words. To do this, round off the number of seconds to the nearest quarter of a minute and then divide. For example, if your total reading time was 3 minutes and 12 seconds, round it off to 3 ¾ or 3.25 minutes and then divide. Your answer will be your words per minute score.

EXAMPLE:

Total number of words on three lines: 23
Divide by 3 and round off: 23 ÷ 3 + 7 2/3 = 8 (rounded off)
Number of lines in the article (or chapter): 120
Multiply number of words per line by number of lines: 8 x 120 = 960 (total words)
Subtract finishing time: 1:13 22
from starting time: 1:05
8 minutes 22 seconds

Round off to the nearest ¼ minute: 8 ½ minutes
Divide time into the total number of words:
960 ÷ 8.5 = 112 + a fraction (your reading rate)

McWhorter, Kathleen T. “College Reading and Study Skills”, pp. 269-270

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