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FBI

Law Enforcement Bulletin



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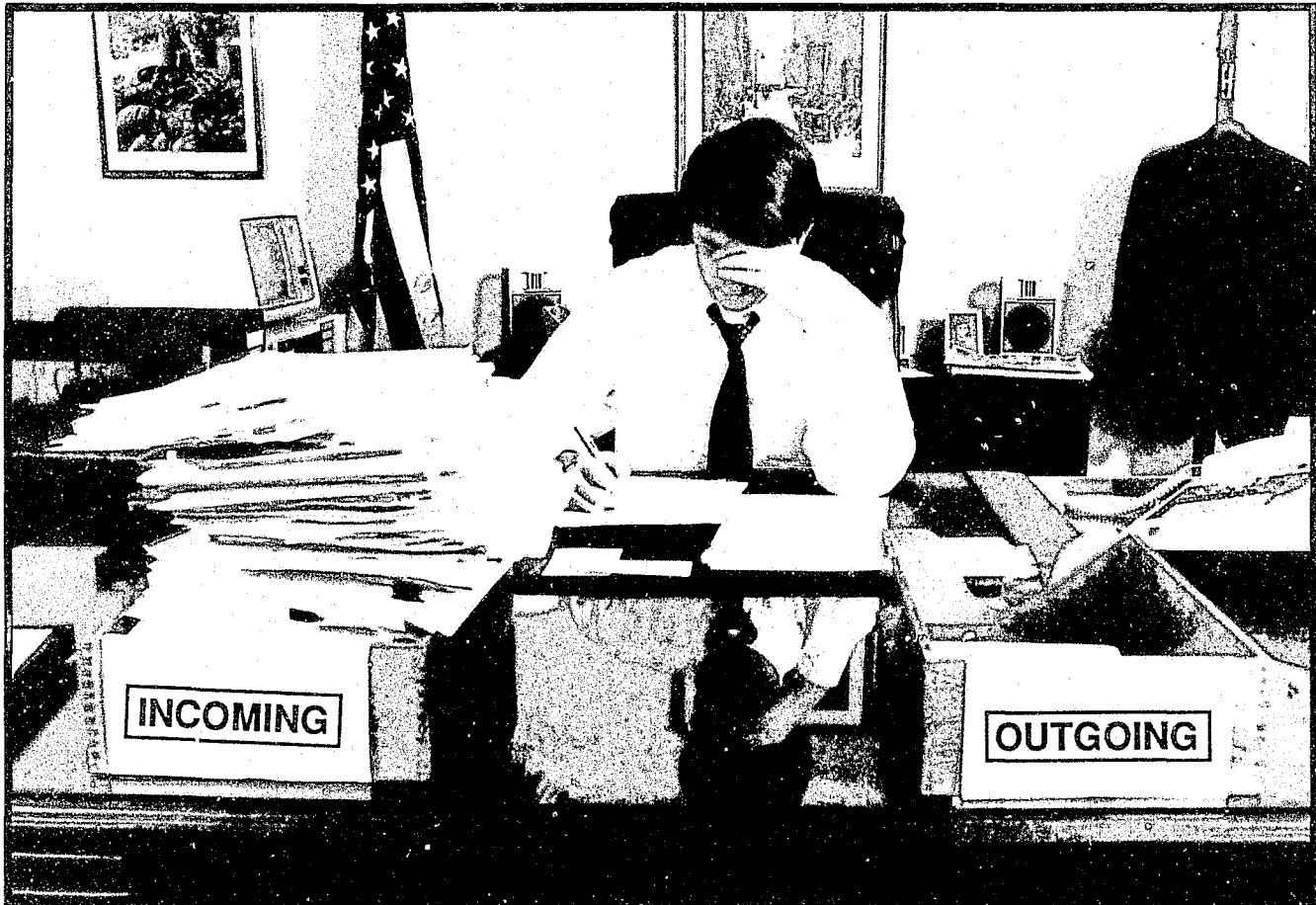
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Reading Management for Police Administrators

By
George Stevens

Reading demands placed on you as police administrators are varied, but always constant. You may have to continuously read reports, memos, or new books to keep current. You must also keep up with the daily mail that threatens to strangle you, even though only a portion of that reading is necessary or helpful. You

were trained, as many of us were in school, to be a power reader, to read deliberately and slowly, to stop and recheck, to double back, to make sure that you've grasped everything. This is invaluable and absolutely necessary for some of your reading. But, you, as police administrators, need to read quickly and efficiently in order to

find information beneficial to you. Somewhere in that stack of incoming mail may be a vital memo or report. The problem is finding it.

Through prescribed drills, you will learn to focus on and eliminate your restrictive reading habits. As a result, your reading speed will increase and you will comprehend more. While some

speed-reading instructors claim that their courses will increase your reading ability to 1,000 words per minute, this goal is unrealistic for most of us.

The following techniques promise a much humbler, yet far more obtainable, goal. By using these techniques, you may increase your reading speed by a more realistic 100 words per minute. With speed as a clerical tool, you will be able to find the time to read the material and obtain information of greatest value to you and your department.

READING PROBLEMS

There are three behaviors that slow down the adult reader. They occur primarily because we have an alphabetical reading system. Subvocalization, regression, and narrow eye span, which facilitate reading for children, hinder adult readers. When you overcome these three deterrents, however, you will immediately improve your reading speed.

But, before you begin these drills, it may be helpful to gauge your current reading speed. Select a short magazine or newspaper article and read for 5 minutes. Then, count the number of words per inch, measure the approximate number of inches you read, and divide by five. You can also use a novel to measure your reading speed. Count the words per line and multiply by the number of lines you read during the 5-minute period to determine your words per minute, then divide by five. This score will give you a starting point from which to improve.

You may also wish to isolate each drill or exercise and practice



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regression, and
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hinder adult readers.**
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on your technique for a longer period of time. Practice will help to solidify these new skills in your mind and help you to combine them into your total reading process later on.

Subvocalization

Subvocalization, which is tiny unnoticeable contractions of the tongue and other speech-related organs made during speech, develops in the early stages of learning to read. When children first learn the alphabet, they interpret each letter into an appropriate noise. Reading aloud encourages children to experience the sound of language and rein-

forces their ability to read. Consequently, children learn to subvocalize and limit their reading speed to their talking speed, which is approximately 120-180 words per minute. This tendency to vocalize becomes an ingrained reading response. Even as adults, many readers still subvocalize as they read and remain slow readers. Thus, in order to increase reading speed to 300-500 words per minute, you must stop subvocalization.

You can stop subvocalization with this simple technique designed to block tongue movement. Place your tongue against the back of your teeth when reading. Don't be concerned about speed. This exercise teaches the brain to read and understand words without vocalizing them. As you become more practiced, your reading speed will improve to over 300-500 words per minute. Subvocalization will disappear when you reach this level, because at high speeds you cannot comfortably vocalize or subvocalize words.

Regression

This tendency to look back over previously read material develops, because at times, you must examine the letters both at the beginning and at the end of words before you know how to pronounce them. Over a period of years, this behavior develops into a reading waver with the eye continuously glancing back to verify letters or words. This can slow down readers to about two-thirds of their potential speed.

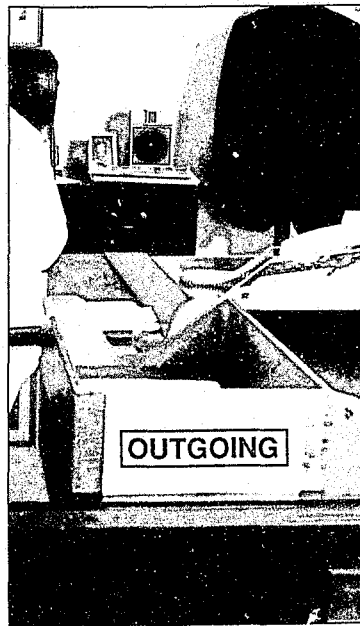
The tendency to look back is natural for a person learning to read, but when it becomes a habit,

it impedes normal reading progression. The trick to eliminating regression is the hand or finger sweep. As you underline the text in a continuous left to right motion, the finger is used as a target by the eye to control its movements. The brain controls eye movement by ocular pursuit, or simply put, tracking objects. Therefore, as you underline from left to right, with a steady smooth sweep, you will eliminate regression.

Several elements are involved in the regression exercise. First, read slowly, using the hand or finger sweep. Novels are particularly well-suited to this drill, so select a novel to practice with and read for 60 seconds. Deliberately read slower than necessary. Your objective: To see every word clearly and intently. Move your finger continuously and slowly across the line. Stare intently at each word. After 60 seconds, return to the beginning and read the section again, a little faster, but still at a comfortable speed. You'll go a little faster and a little further. Repeat this process again, and try to read even faster. This means that your finger will cover the words as quickly as you can see them. Place your emphasis on tracking the words rapidly, not regressing.

Narrow Eye Span

Narrow eye span inhibits fast reading. Again, because you learned to read using an alphabet, you examined each word very closely in order to master spelling. This limits your eye span to a few small word clusters or substantial parts of larger words. Even as an



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***Narrow eye span
inhibits fast reading.***
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adult, the peripheral eye span limit is between two and three words.

To help eliminate narrow eye span, one technique is to try searching for your name in a magazine or newspaper article. Using this technique, you'll learn to take two lines at a time, as fast as you can, and to search back and forth. This is the same technique you commonly used when searching for a name in a phone book. Also, repeating your name to yourself will block any tendency to subvocalize. This enables you to work on subvocalization and narrow eye span simultaneously.

Another tactic for widening eye span involves reading and rereading a newspaper column at increasing rates of speed. This has

some of the same effects as reading a column slow to fast; however, the important difference here is to maintain comprehension as best you can while you are rereading. Select a magazine or newspaper article and read the first page or at least the first column, depending how long they are. Having read that column, reread it in 30 seconds. Now, reread it in 20 seconds and then go as far as you can in 10 seconds.

OTHER CORRECTIVE DRILLS

Transfer Reading Exercise

To further increase your reading speed, there are additional exercises, such as the transfer reading exercise. Transfer reading is like scrimmaging in sports. You'll now merge the drill techniques into the game format. In essence, transfer reading means reading a little faster than is comfortable while still being conscious that you are looking at phrases—your eyes will move across the line and keep an even speed. Similarly, your concern should not be comprehension. In a scrimmage, you are not too concerned with the score—here also you are concerned only with technique.

Reading For Set

Reading for set is reading for comprehension. As you read, you will answer questions such as Who? What? Where? When? and Why? An important element when reading for set is to visualize whenever possible. Get a mental impression, a picture of the action. Imagery doubles memory. So, whenever possible, form some mental pictures of the story. While

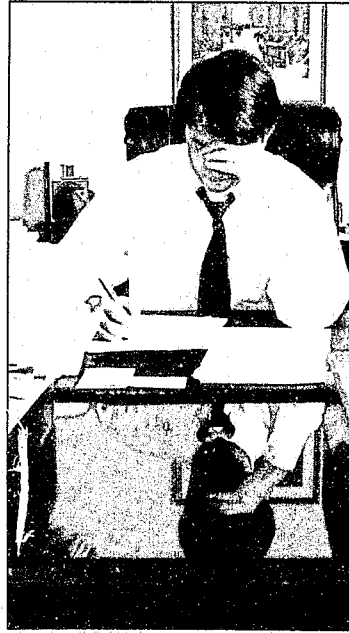
regression, subvocalization, and narrow eye span slow you down, visual memory will increase your speed.

Open your novel to the first page, or to whatever page you happen to be on at this point, and read, in a relaxed frame of mind, for 5 or 10 minutes. In that period of time certain questions will answer themselves automatically: Who? What? Where? When? and Why? This orients your memory to the novel's basic structure. It is very difficult to read for speed until you have completed this drill and have read for set.

Having read for set, stop and jot down the title, the author, and the names of the main characters. A few moments of jotting this information down will serve to fix it in your memory. This technique is essential because writing down information fixes it in your mind, making it much easier to recall later. If possible, discussing the book with someone else also proves to be a very valuable tactic to ensure accurate memory.

Reading Fast to Slow

The final drill is reading fast to slow. This involves timed readings and intense concentration to improve comprehension. This exercise involves a process of skimming, followed by slower reading. To perform this drill, pick a magazine or newspaper article with several columns and read the first column for set. Remember that set deals with answering the questions of Who? What? Where? When? and Why? Then, use the next three columns for a drill. Start at the top of the drill column and skim down the middle



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[Police administrators] need to read quickly and efficiently. ...
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of the column, staring as intently as you can. Do this in approximately 5 seconds regardless of whether you are actually reading the words or not. Repeat this process in a 10-second, then 20-second, and finally in a 30-second timed reading. At this point read the columns as fast as you can comprehend. You will find that by having done the very fast timed readings and having read the columns several times that your comprehension and your reading speed will improve.

Check Reading Speed

To check your reading speed, take one or two columns from an

article and read for both speed and comprehension. Again, check your words per minute using one of the methods previously mentioned. Many people tend to underestimate their reading speed once they become skillful, so it's good just to reassure yourself that you are over that 250 or maybe into the 350-400 range by checking your rate periodically. Remember that normal reading speed is approximately 250 words per minute. Also, an occasional speed run does a lot for your concentration and keeps your mind from wandering.

Even a 100 words-per-minute increase, which you probably experienced when you practiced and drilled with these techniques, is a sizable improvement. For most of us, it represents an increase of approximately one-third in our reading speed.

SUMMARY

Subvocalization, regression, and narrow eye span, behaviors which slowed you down and kept you reading as you were taught, will no longer hinder your normal reading progression. Having learned these simple techniques, you, as police administrators, will be able to manage your reading, to eliminate restrictive reading habits, and to read more efficiently. By doing so, you will find additional time for other more important duties. FBI

George Stevens teaches reading skills courses to managers within the U.S. Department of Justice.