

# Being digital

## Scanning and skimming a web page

### 1: Introduction

Scanning and skimming are reading techniques that are really useful when you have to find and read a lot of text online. Both techniques will help you to get to key information quickly.

People tend to read only a small proportion of the text on a webpage. In fact, eye tracking studies have shown that most of us use techniques like scanning and skimming when we're looking for specific information to focus on. This might be when you're studying, researching ideas relating to work, or comparing products to buy online.

- You start by scanning a series of pages to find those you want to look at more closely.
- Once you've found an interesting page, you skim it to find the content you need.

### Learning outcome

By the end of this activity, you will be able to find key information quickly from a web page or online document.

## 2: Scanning

Scanning involves running your eye quickly down the text to locate specific words or phrases that you are interested in.

Scanning will help you to decide whether you should read further, and how useful the website or document might be. You can scan:

- headings and subheadings
- images and artwork
- the body text itself, e.g. for authors' names
- the sitemap.

Have a look at the website below, titled **Bicycle enlightenment**. Practise how to scan by counting the number of times you see the word 'cycling'.

[Bicycle enlightenment](#)

### How did you do?

Are you confident you found every mention? Go through it again, more carefully, to check for any you missed. If you have difficulty with this activity then try to get into the habit of scanning each web page you open, and you'll improve your skills.

## 3: Skimming

When you skim, you read quickly to get an overview before you start to read in depth.

Although you may still need to read the entire text, you can decide where you want to concentrate your time.

Skimming the text quickly involves:

- getting an indication of the scope and content of the information
- looking at the first sentence of each paragraph to see what it's about
- noting the key points in any summaries.

## Exercise

We are all used to 'skim reading' print, in the form of newspapers.

Have a look at a web page produced by a news site, and see how long it takes you to decide whether you want to read more on any particular story.

Newspapers and sites, such as **BBC News**, are great for practising your skimming skills. They're written to make it easy to make fast decisions on whether or not you want to read more. Each story is given just a small amount of space, with links to more detail if you want it.

## 4: Summary

Here are a couple of tips to help you to scan and skim when you are reading information online.

- Before you start, change the dimensions of the page window to a size you feel comfortable with. Your eyes lose their place over wide columns, so making the window narrower may help you to work faster. You might also want to increase the font size in your browser settings.
- Unless it's a very simple page, take a moment to decide how to work through it. For example, you might try working across the top, and then down one column at a time.

## Next steps

The article below provides some interesting information on how people read online information.

[The Stats are In: You're Just Skimming This Article](#)

## References

### Being digital activity

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