

Scanning and skimming a web page

1. Introduction

Scanning and skimming are two reading techniques to help you to read online information more efficiently and quickly.

- 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.

Scanning and skimming are useful ways of getting an overview of the content without reading it all. You can use it as part of your filtering process when faced with a lot of information, in your study, work and everyday life.

Learning outcome

By the end of this activity, you will be able to use scanning and skimming techniques 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 enables you to get a feel for the information and will help you to decide how useful the website or document might be and whether you should read further.

When **scanning** you should focus on:

- the layout of the text
- headings and subheadings
- contents, index or sitemap
- bulleted lists
- summary or abstract
- introduction and conclusion

You can also 'scan' to locate specific information, for example by glancing over the text to find a name or phrase that you are interested in.

3. Skimming

Skimming is one step further than scanning and involves a slightly closer investigation by picking out keywords and reading specific parts of the text.

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 involves:

- getting an indication of the scope and content of the information
- reading the first and last paragraphs to get the main points
- looking at the first sentence of each paragraph to see where the content of the paragraph will lead
- noting the key points in any summaries or conclusions
- looking at any figures or infographics which provide a summary of the content

Looking quickly at these elements enables you to get an overall impression and decide if it will be useful or not. If not, don't bother to read anymore!

4. Putting it into practice

News sites are great for practising your reading techniques as they're written to make it easy to make fast decisions on whether you want to read on.

Each story is given just a small amount of space, with links to more detail if you want it.

Now try to practice scanning and skimming the following news article:

[How to take the perfect nap \(and improve your health\)](#)

- First scan the article to identify the main sections for clues about the overall content.
- Then skim the article to extract any key points.

If you are a screen reader user, please check their help pages to see if they support skimming and scanning. JAWS screen reader users may find the following guidance useful:

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[Guide to use screen readers for skimming and scanning \(Word\)](#)

[Guide to use screen readers for skimming and scanning \(PDF\)](#)

You may wish to take some notes before reading the feedback below.

Feedback

With just a brief **scan**, you should have a general sense of the article's layout and feel for the content. You may have identified the headings and spotted the text in bold and the link to the study.

By **skimming** the article, you may have selected and read specific parts of the article under each heading, e.g. the introductory sentence. You might have identified sections that you want to revisit and read fully.

5. Summary

Summary

In this activity you have looked at the two reading techniques: scanning and skimming, to help you extract and read relevant information more quickly. Once you have the hang of these you can get through a substantial amount of information in quite a short time.

Next Steps

Learning to read more efficiently is a skill that develops with practice.

Here are some tips to help you to **scan** and **skim** the next time you are reading information online:

- Have a set of questions in mind whilst you are reading (e.g. 'What am I reading this for?') to keep you focussed on identifying relevant content.
- 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.
- Focus on headings, subheadings, sections, and keywords as you look through the information.
- It may help to change the dimensions of the browser window to reduce the visual distractions from other content on the page. You can also increase the font size in your browser settings.

- Further guidance on individual adjustments to make your device easier to use is available from Ability Net and their [My Computer My Way guide](#).