

Setting goals seems to be a human passion. Perhaps it wasn't too long ago when you set your sights on becoming certified as an ophthalmic assistant. Now you have chosen a new goal, expanding your horizons and increasing your value to your employer and patients. Your decision also means that you must once again buckle down and study. Allow the worthiness of your major goal (becoming certified) to empower and motivate you as you take the smaller steps that move you in that direction, whether it is breaking brand new technical ground or just completing the day's reading. Having a goal when studying will give you purpose and motivation to continue and to improve.

Hitting the Books

Reading

It may be your tendency to zip through everything you read. In and of itself, fast reading is not necessarily poor reading. The key in study-reading is to comprehend what you read, regardless of your reading speed.

Here are several suggestions to help you increase your reading speed and comprehension:

1. Before you start, know why you are reading. In our case, we are seeking to learn and understand new material. We are looking for information.
2. Glance over the headings and subheadings to get a quick grasp of the main ideas before you start to read. (More on this later.)
3. When reading the material for the first time, take it slow and easy.
4. Look up any words you don't know. Increasing your vocabulary will increase your cumulative reading speed.

There are several bad habits that will slow down your reading. You'll need to eliminate them. Here are the biggest offenders:

1. Using your finger or a pencil to track along as you read. Stop!
2. Moving your whole head as you read across the page. Instead, you should move your eyes across the page, keeping your head still.
3. Moving your lips as you read. (To find out if you do this, hold a pencil between your lips while reading. Don't bite or grip it with your teeth, just hold it gently between your lips. If the pencil waggles and falls out as you read, you're afflicted.) The remedy is to put the pencil between your lips every time you read for a week or so. Concentrate on holding the pencil still. You eventually should be able to retrain yourself and kick the habit.
4. Reading each and every word independently. Train yourself to read groups of words instead.

Here are a few pointers on careful reading:

1. Before you start, have an idea of what you're looking for. Skim the headings to see what's in store.
2. As you read, concentrate. Pay attention to what you're doing. (More on this later when we talk about studying.)
3. Relax. Try to leave your problems behind. Focus on your reading.
4. Don't panic if you didn't seem to catch on after reading the material for the first time. Don't freeze up. Read it again.
5. Take a break after 45 minutes or so of straight reading. Reward your brain and body with a nice long stretch. Your eyes need a break, too. But instead of closing them, gaze at something far off in the distance for a minute or so. This will relax the ciliary muscle and help prevent accommodative spasms.

Good reading habits can be learned. With practice (and you'll be getting plenty of that) your reading skills gradually will improve. If you have a serious reading deficit, you should consider professional counseling.