

Fixations in Reading

Do you know what your eyes are doing when you read a line of print? Chances are that you think you do, but you actually don't. You assume that your eyes move smoothly along the line. According to the men who study vision and have scientific means of determining the facts, this is a wrong guess. Using an instrument like a movie camera, they have recorded the movement of "reading eyes" on a strip of film. What they have found is that our eyes, far from moving across the page in one even movement, make as many starts and stops as an automobile in Sunday traffic. They start, move a little distance, pause, start again, pause again, and so on to the end of the line.

When the examiners of filmstrips had determined this pattern of movement of the eyes, they were able to arrive at some important conclusions about reading. They reasoned that the pauses or "fixations" were made during the time when the reader was looking directly at the printed words on the line. The duration of each fixation, they found, depended on the amount of time it took the brain to translate the printed symbols into meaning. When the reader's eyes were moving, they are not looking at the words. But the time spent moving the eyes was only about one-tenth as long as the time spent on fixations.

Do ... know what ... eyes ... doing ... read ... line ... print? Chances are ... think ... do ... actually don't ... assume ... your eyes ... smoothly ... According ... men ... study vision ... scientific ... means ... determining ... facts ... wrong guess ... Using instrument ... movie camera ... recorded ... movement ... "reading ... eyes" ... film ... found ... eyes from moving ... one even movement, make ... many starts ... stops ... start, move ... little distance, pause, start again, pause ... so ... on ... end ... line. When ... examiners ... determined ... pattern ... movement of..eyes ... arrive at ... important conclusions ... reading ... reasoned ... pauses or fixations ... made during ... time ... reader ... looking directly ... printed words on ... line ... duration ... fixation ... depended ... amount ... time ... took ... brain ... translate ... symbols into meaning. When ... eyes ... moving ... not looking ... words ... time spent moving ... eyes ... only ... one-tenth ... long as ... spent ... fixations.

The first selection contains approximately 230 words. The second has been cut to approximately 115, or half the total number. Meaning can be gotten from less than 50% of the total printed words on the page, if the reader has the desire to speed up and read in thought and phrase units rather than word by word.