

Train your brain to read faster

Can you train your brain to read faster? Perhaps! Recent brain research and my 23 years of volunteer literacy tutoring combine with some promising ways you just might be able to. My average student improved their reading speed by 37%! However, if you're already reading over 500 Words Per Minute (WPM), it may work not for you. If you're interested, stay tuned for brain training ideas!

We'll look at 3 keys to improving your reading speed so you can learn to read faster and become more productive. But first, we'll look at the research.

Recent brain research has found that the adult brain of good readers does not process words as wholes, but instead, as neuroscientist Stanislas Dehaene explains, by analyzing the individual letters and letter teams at the same time in a "massively parallel architecture."¹

First, the brain recognizes letters—does this sound easy? Letters include writing done by hand, even messy writing. Computers have trouble being trained to do this, it's harder than it seems.

Next, the letters are translated into sounds so fast that the adult mind thinks it is recognizing them as wholes, when in fact, each letter and letter team is being processed in parallel. In the brains of good readers, they are processed in the area of the brain that processes sounds and oral language. If you want to learn more about how this amazing process works, see 40L's Your Brain on Reading YouTube playlist.²

Over my years as a tutor, I've worked with hundreds of students, individually and in groups. With the help of 40L volunteers, I've been able to reach a lot more than I could on my own through group classes. As I've refined my teaching material in light of research, I've found that my students have progressed faster and faster.

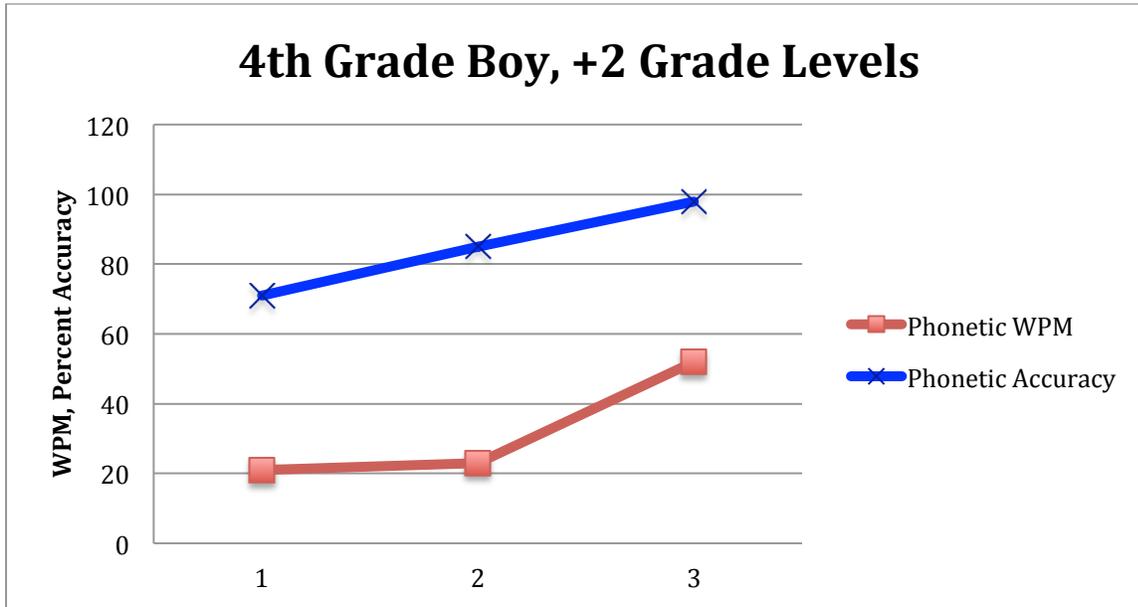
I've combined findings from research with what works with my students to improve your reading speed in just a month or two with material that is free to print. We'll look at how you can harness these research findings to improve your own reading speed.

But first, let's look at a few students. The first 2 students were reading at grade level, but they were thought to have reading comprehension problems. They each improved 4 reading grade levels and improved their oral reading speed on average 24%. The next

¹ Dehaene, Stanislas, "[The Massive Impact of Literacy on the Brain and its Consequences for Education](#)," Human Neuroplasticity and Education, 2011, p. 23 [Note: Stanislas Dehaene's 2009 book "Reading in the Brain" has a more detailed explanations and compares many different studies.]

² 40L's Youtube Your Brain on Reading playlist, available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlyZBi_07vk&list=PLJLxBWdK_5l1u9v4FTXD3CXgCBIGeSZpM

student was 4 grade levels behind. He went through my Syllables Spell Success³ class twice. He improved 2 reading grade levels and we helped teach his mom how to work with him at home so he could continue to improve. However, his reading speed did not improve much at first, just his accuracy. After the first class, he improved his oral reading speed by 8% while improving accuracy from 71% to 85%. But, after break and then the second class, his oral reading speed doubled while his accuracy improved to 99%!



You might not have such large gains. I have only measured oral reading speed so far, but oral and silent reading speeds are correlated and my students have said that they have been able to read books faster and finish their homework faster. The slower you read, the more likely you are to see improvement. It may take a month or two to train your brain. But, it is easy and free to try.

I've had students who were good readers who took the group syllables class to improve their spelling and writing or learn Greek and Latin word roots. They also improved their reading speed.

There are 3 keys to improving reading speed. We'll look at these 3 keys now to help you harness these findings to learn to read faster.

The first key is to focus on sounds. Brain research shows that the brains of good readers process the sounds of words very fast in parallel. I found with my students that the more I focused on sounds, the better they did. If you improve the speed with which your brain processes the sounds, the effects multiply with each word and sentence you read—they all

³ 40L's Syllables Spell Success lesson exercises are free to print, and the lessons are free to watch on 40L's YouTube Syllables Spell Success playlist, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP6voC4hBNY&list=PLJLxBWdK_5I2xN78qeGDDB1Lr5lyP6CHO

contain the basic sound spelling patterns of English. The basic sounds are covered in 40L's one page vowel and consonant chart.⁴ Don Potter's Phonovisual YouTube video explains their order, these charts and the Phonovisual charts are both made from Caroline Yale's 1914 Northampton Vowel and Consonant Charts.⁵

The sounds that most people do not have overlearned are the 2 letter vowel teams. 40L has a separate chart for overlearning the 2 letter vowel teams.⁶ First, you drill them with in color with the key, then in color without the key, then in black and white.

The syllables spell success program, with free videos to watch and all the files free to print and use, teaches spelling rules for the 2 letter vowel teams that will help your brain learn them even better, which should provide faster recall.

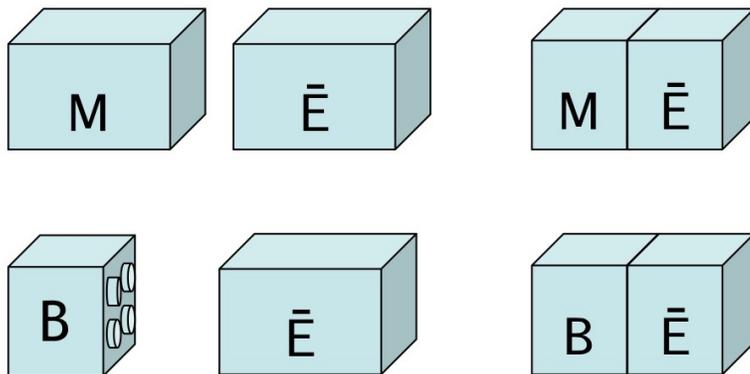
To train your brain on Key 1, sounds, do daily drill with these two charts and complete the Syllables program.

The second key is to focus on syllables. Syllables are the true unbroken sounds your brain uses to process words. They are the true atoms of reading instruction. We'll look at some sound waveforms to see why. But before we look at the complex version, we'll look at a quick visual explanation with something everyone understands—blocks. These blocks represent letter sounds. But, letter sounds are not true sounds, they are actually approximations. A few sounds like m or the vowels can be said in isolation exactly how they are said in a word, but most consonant sounds cannot physically be said in isolation without the addition of a bit of a vowel sound at the end. Even if you think you are saying the sound of b, /b/ without any vowel sound, you are just shorting the length of time that you are saying the vowel at the end, it is physically impossible to produce a pure sound of the letter b. And, while the sound of m /m/ makes the same sound in isolation as when it is combined in a word, you usually say it for a longer length of time when you say it in isolation. When you put the letter sound approximation of b /b/ together with the sound of long e /e/ to make the word "be", you have to subtract the bit of the vowel sound at the end. The blocks show how the end vowel sound of b is hidden or subtracted when it is combined with e and how the sound of m is shortened when it is combined with e to make me.

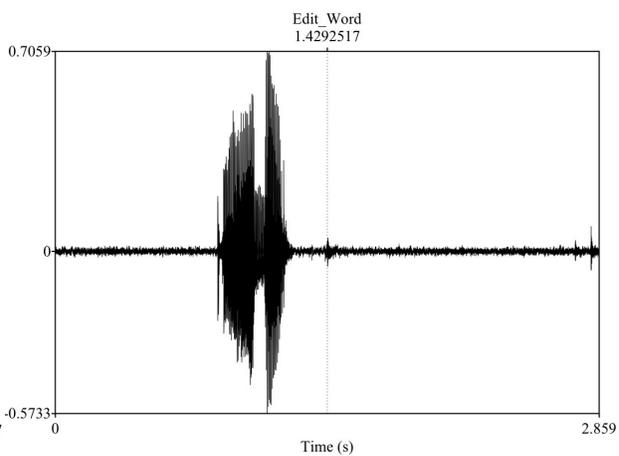
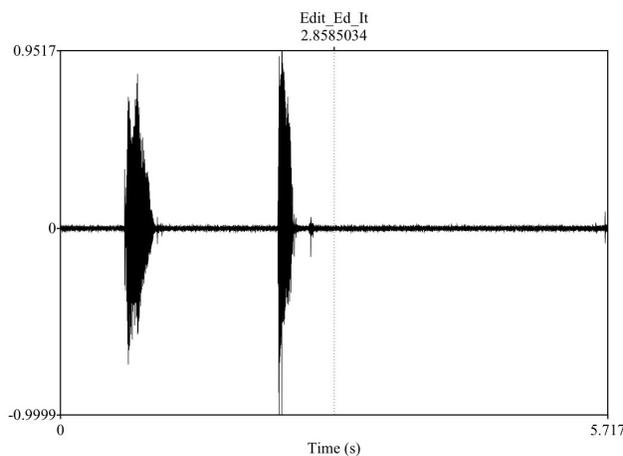
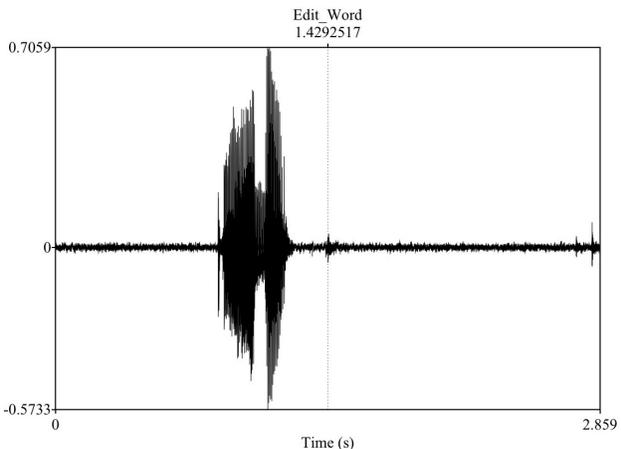
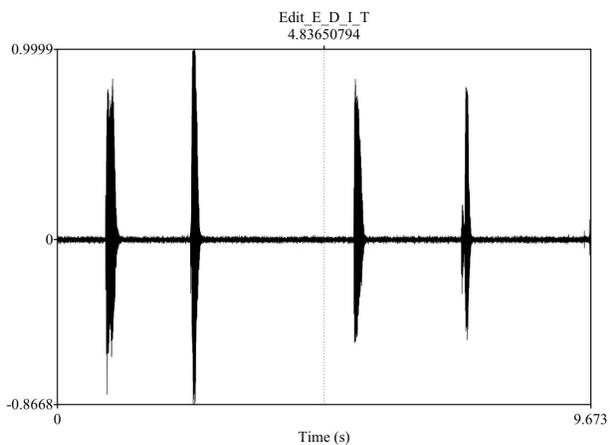
⁴ 40L's vowel and consonant charts and cards, available at:
<http://www.thephonicspage.org/On%20Reading/Resources/40LChartsCombined.pdf>

⁵ Don Potter's Phonovisual YouTube chart explanation, available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEy9D4sBEok&index=2&list=PLJLxBWdK_5l3aBN-qowg2u8BdGYM64pTi

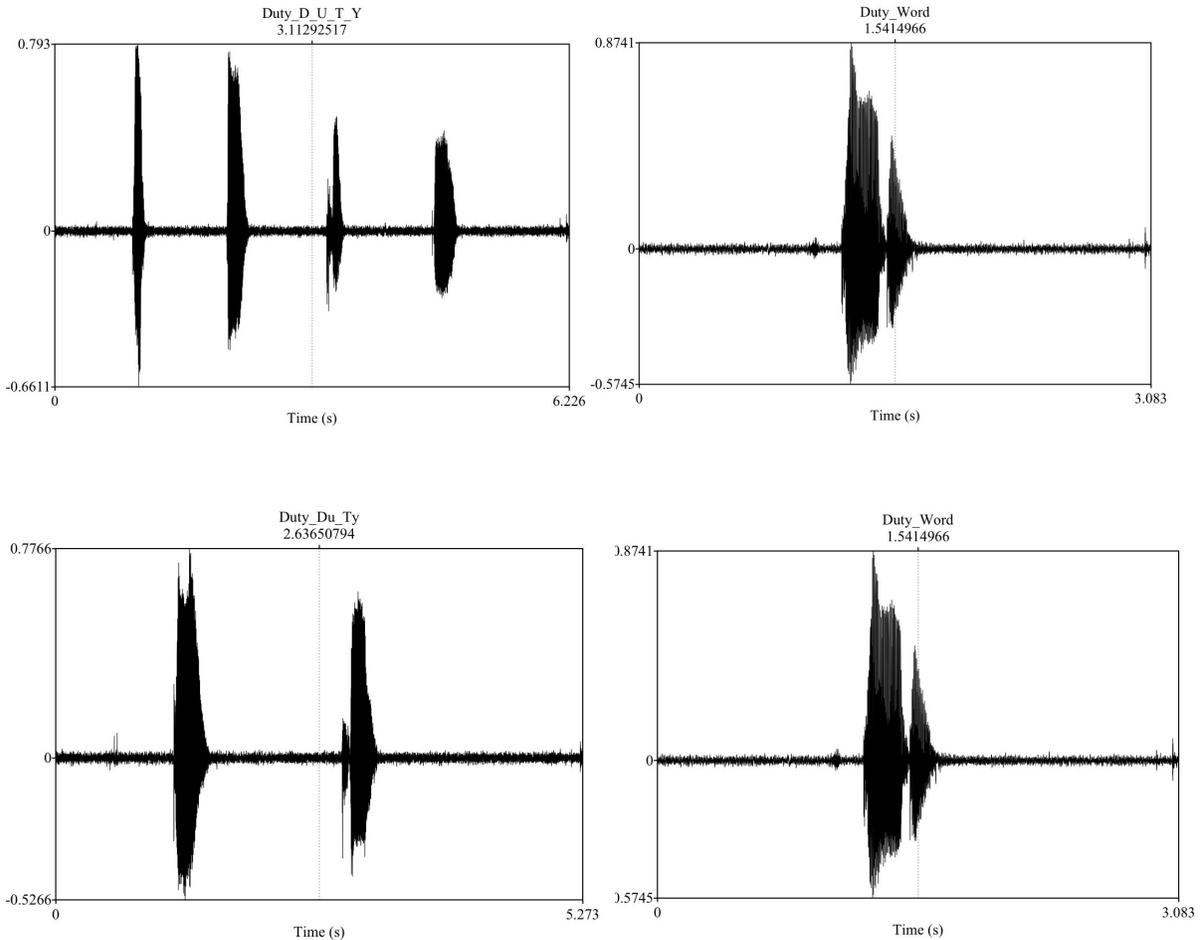
⁶ 40L's 2 Letter vowel team chart, available at:
<http://www.thephonicspage.org/On%20Reading/Resources/OnePageVowelChart.pdf>



Here are the letter sound approximations /e/ /d/ /i/ /t/ vs. the word “edit.” It is hard to see how they match, right? Now, let’s look at the syllables /ed/ and /it/ vs. the word “edit.”



It's a much better match. Now, a long vowel word. Again, the syllables /du/ and /ty/ match the word "duty" better than the letter sound approximations.



Because of this, syllables are the true atoms of reading instruction and learning syllables is very important to becoming a more efficient, faster reader.

To train your brain with the second key, syllables, use 40L's 10 lesson Syllables Spell Success program. This program will teach you to break words into syllables based on syllable division rules. Then, you will practice with words already broken up into syllables from Webster's Speller. For additional syllable practice, read all the 2 or more syllable words in Webster's Speller, available from Don Potter as a free PDF or in book form from Amazon.⁷

⁷ Webster's Speller, available from Don Potter as a free PDF: <http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/websterspellingbookmethod.pdf> or in book form at Amazon, titled Noah Webster's Spelling Book Method for Teaching Reading and Spelling:

The 3rd and final key is nonsense words. Nonsense words are like push ups for the reading brain. They are the ultimate test of its ability to process sounds, straining its limits while building strength.

40L's syllables program includes a lot of opportunity to practice with nonsense words. Better yet, there are syllable division exercises with nonsense words, allowing you to practice 2 key areas at once!

There are also word lists of nonsense words organized into groups of 25 for you to track your speed and accuracy of reading different types of nonsense words. You start with easy nonsense words and graduate to a list with a mix of all types of nonsense words. The syllables program also includes tracking explanation and graphs so you can chart your progress.

To train your brain with nonsense words, you will complete the nonsense word syllable division exercises in the syllables program and do daily reading and tracking of nonsense words. Continue daily reading and tracking of the nonsense words for at least a month after completing the syllables program. The nonsense word reading and tracking can be done in less than 10 minutes a day. If nonsense word accuracy is less than 100% after the syllables program is complete, do daily readings to work on building up nonsense word accuracy and only time for speed once a week. Work on accuracy before speed. Speed will come with time and **accurate** practice. You do not want to practice bad habits.

The three keys to improving reading speed are:

- Sounds
- Syllables
- Nonsense words

To implement the power of these three keys, you need to go through the Syllables Spell Success program, approximately 1 hour a day for 10 days. The rest of the work on these keys can be done in 10 minutes a day over the next month or two. You will be doing a daily review of the sounds charts, a daily nonsense word reading and tracking, and 5 minutes daily reading of 2+ syllable words in Webster's Speller, just the words, not the sentences.

If you have a slowdown on the MWIA or cannot read the nonsense words with 100% accuracy, remediation will be faster if you limit outside reading of sentences, stories, and books for at least a few weeks. It takes time to build new reading habits, and outside reading can trigger old reading habits. Reading nonsense words and lists of words help

https://www.amazon.com/Websters-Spelling-Method-Teaching-Reading/dp/1496153278/ref=sr_1_sc_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1395106994&sr=8-1-spell&keywords=webster+spelling+book+douglas+dickson

you focus on sounding out each word from left to right and building up your brain's new reading habits.

Here is a more complete explanation of what you need to do to improve your reading speed using these 3 keys:

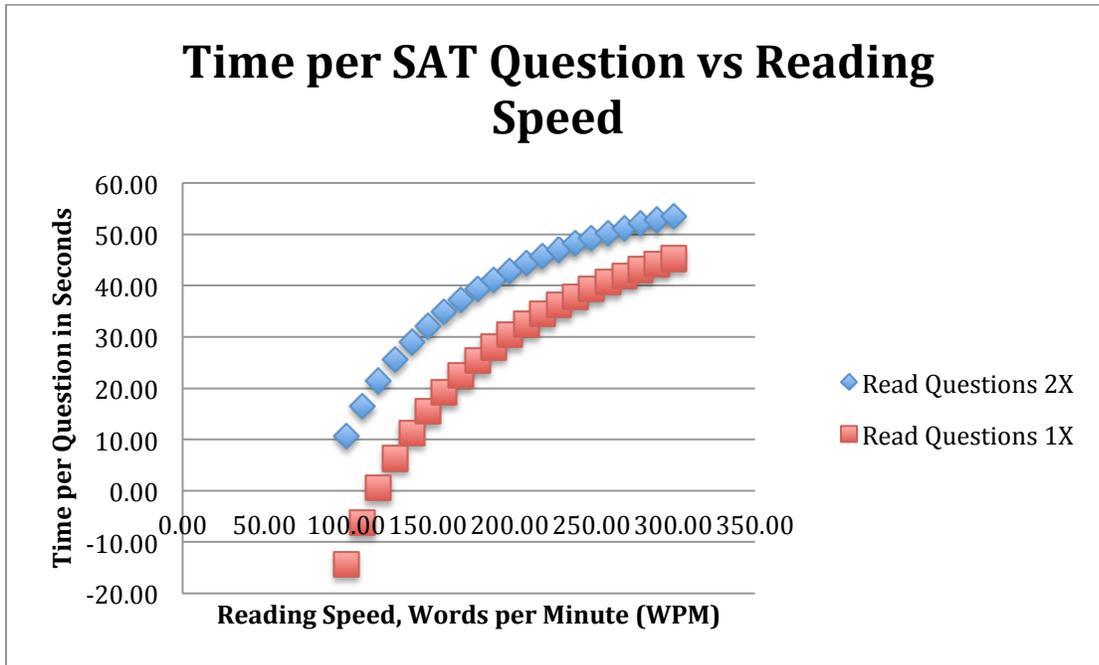
1. Complete the Syllables Spell Success program using the nonsense word documents. This will take 10 days, approximately an hour per day. Do daily drill with the one page vowel and consonant chart. After completing Syllable lesson 2, do daily drill with both charts, the one page vowel and consonant chart and the one page vowel chart.
2. After completing number one above, continue daily chart drilling. Most people need to spend more time on the one page vowel chart. Do daily drill of nonsense words, using version 2 of the nonsense word document and the extra words version of the nonsense words document. If you complete all of the nonsense word documents and are still reading the nonsense words with less than 100% accuracy or less than the norms for your age, go through the nonsense words documents again, starting with version 1 that was used with the Syllables program.
3. At the same time as number 2 above, add in 5 to 10 minutes a day of reading 2+ syllable words from the complete Webster's Speller. Try some 5 to 7 syllable words early on and if they are really challenging or tiring, save some of the 2 and 3 syllable words to alternate with the ending difficult words. To help you keep track of your progress, you can put check marks in pencil next to the lines you have read and keep two sticky tabs to mark your spots. (Or one sticky tab if you are not alternating between difficult and easy words.)

Is it worth the time? If it works, you will get back your effort in spades. Here is a graph showing how many hours it takes to read a book at a few different reading speeds:

Book	300 WPM	400 WPM	500 WPM
Tuck Everlasting	1.5	1.2	0.9
Fahrenheit 451	2.6	1.9	1.5
The Martian Chronicles	3.6	2.7	2.2
To Kill A Mockingbird	5.5	4.1	3.3
Last of the Mohicans	8.1	6.1	4.8
Crime and Punishment	11.8	8.8	7.1

If you improved from 300 to 400 WPM, you could save 3 hours during a slog through Crime and Punishment. If you were going to use Cliff Notes, well, you could read those faster, too.

It can also improve the time you have to think about the questions on the SAT. Here is a graph showing how much time per question you will have at reading speeds between 100 and 300 WPM:



And, a chart showing how that improvement could lead to more time to think about each question, it shows how many seconds per question you will have after reading the SAT reading passages at different Word per Minute rates:

WPM	Read Questions 1X	Read Questions 2X
100	11	-14
150	32	15
200	43	30
250	49	39
300	54	45

At 100 WPM, you don't have time to read the questions twice. At 150 WPM, you can read the questions twice and you will have more time to think about each question. The faster you read, the more time you'll have to think about each question.

Besides building a stronger reading brain, the Syllables Spell Success lessons can help you out in other areas. In the first half of the Syllables lessons you'll learn things that could improve your spelling. In the second half of the lessons, you'll learn things that can improve your vocabulary and strengthen your writing.

