



# The Reading Environment

There are many things which can interfere with effective reading. Some of these involve common sense and can be easily changed. Others are more subtle and may require long and patient effort if they are to be overcome. Obviously, we should make the simple changes first, since these will give the greatest improvement with the least effort.

Something which most people can control rather easily is their reading environment. A poor physical setting can make reading far more difficult than it has to be, and yet a little planning can get around most of the harmful elements you may find. It is a question of motivation. We usually can do what we really want to do!

- **Lighting.** Often it is helpful to do your reading- the bulk of it, at least- in the same place. Check the lighting there. Is it adequate? You should be able to see the page without strain. Does the light create a glare, or are you in the habit of reading in the direct sunlight? Either extreme- too much light or too little- can cause strain and fatigue, and lower your reading efficiency.
- **Ventilation.** Stuffy rooms put you to sleep. You should have plenty of fresh air (but not a draft) and the temperature should be fairly cool. Otherwise, you'll find yourself going to sleep over the most exciting books.
- **Reading Position.** Your position should be neither too comfortable nor too uncomfortable. The first condition puts you right back to sleep again. In fact, some people "read themselves to sleep" in bed every night- which is fine if sleep, rather than reading, is what you're after. An uncomfortable position can create a strain, however subtle, which results in fatigue.
- **Focal Distance.** Hold your book at an angle and keep it about 18 inches from your eyes. Remember: Long arms are not a substitute for corrective lenses. If you need glasses, wear them while you read. Persistent fatigue while studying or reading might be Nature's way of telling you that glasses are needed. Have an optometrist check your close-range vision.
- **Distractions.** Most important, what about distractions you can see and hear? No matter what you think, tests show that you can only pay attention to one thing at a time. If you sit near a door or window, every movement will claim your attention. If you have a radio or record player going, your concentration may continually wander from book to sound. And reading with the television going combines the worst of all possible distractions.

Give yourself every break. If you are going to read, prepare things so you can read unhindered. If there is something more important, put the book aside. There are times to read and, just as definitely, there are times when reading must give way to other considerations.

## TYPES OF READING

### RECREATIONAL

#### NOVELS

MYSTERY  
ADVENTURE  
SPY  
WAR

#### FACTUAL

BIOGRAPHY  
HISTORY  
SCIENCE

### KEEPING UP

#### NEWSPAPERS

LOCAL  
NY TIMES  
TRADE  
WALL STREET

#### MAGAZINES

TIME  
NEWSWEEK  
NAT'L GEO

#### JOURNALS

ENGINEERING  
PSYCHOLOGY  
MANAGEMENT

### STUDY

#### TEXTBOOKS

COLLEGE  
GRADUATE  
PROFESSIONAL

### PURPOSES OF THE READER:

- PASS TIME
- GATHER INFORMATION
- MASTER A SUBJECT

©Academic Skills Center, Dartmouth College 2001