

# The Harsh Truth About Speed-Reading

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## ***The Kernel:***

For a long time, people have claimed to be able to read very quickly without any loss of comprehension—and many have claimed to teach this amazing skill. President Kennedy was one famous speed-reader, who could supposedly finish reading the *New York Times* in minutes; according to *Time*, he could read about 1,200 words a minute, or about three times the rate of a top college-level reader (he arrived at that number himself). More recently, “six-times World Speed Reading Champion” Anne Jones allegedly devoured J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in 47 minutes, Dan Brown’s *Inferno* in just under 42 minutes, and Harper Lee’s *Go Set a Watchman* in 25 minutes, 31 seconds.

But do any of these records stand up to scrutiny? When I asked Jones if it would be fair to say she skimmed the books, she responded with a question herself: “I am not going to give you a quote about skimming. Instead I am going to ask you to test yourself. Think of the last book you read. You may have read it over days or even weeks. Who were the main characters? What were the main plot points, settings and themes? How well did you do? Now imagine someone asks you to answer 30 questions on details in the book. How well do you think you would do?”

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The FTC isn’t the only group contesting speed-readers’ claims. Researchers have consistently debunked them, and according to a new review published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* by Keith Rayner and colleagues, science offers a strong rebuttal. The review cites evidence that some speed-reading techniques such as simultaneously reading large segments of the page—are not even biologically or psychologically possible. This is due to the inherent limitation imposed by our foveal viewing area, which is about the size of one’s thumb held at arm’s length.

Read the whole story: [The Kernel](#)