



Time is our most precious commodity, both on and off the field. As players and coaches, we all have the same 1,440 minutes per day to go about our business and hopefully find time for the daily activities we desire.

We spend hours each day reading news articles, stories and personal notes, either in print or digitally. But what if you could improve your reading speed and comprehension level while also increasing your chances of swinging at strikes? It sounds silly, I know. But so did telling hitting coaches to look at nothing and see everything using an open focus approach.

In the academic world, we all experience an occasional "aha" moment. This connection first came to me years ago while watching elite athletes from different sports look at objects—ranging from anything to charts, food menus or people in a crowded room. How were they processing visual information differently than others?

The correlation between reading habits and game performance really hit me over the head when a former seven-time All-Star and two American League batting champions talked about "sweeping" sentences as they read and creating images through the words on the pages to help them remember. A former NHL All-Star also spoke to me about seeing the ice better by paying attention more to the open ice and trying to connect the dots in his mind of where he should be. Finally, spending time with the Yokohoma BayStars—a pro baseball team in Japan—and talking with American players and coaches who have also witnessed Japanese players working on their "speed of play" through math puzzles and spacing contests.

Speed reading is a technique that allows you to take in the printed word just like you take in images while watching a movie. It allows you to read an entire magazine or book at speeds that can amount to two to 10 times faster than the average rate. Eventually, you learn to condition the right side of your brain to view the words as images instead of sounding them out on the left side. This completely changes how your brain processes information.

There are hundreds of techniques on how to increase your speed of reading. The book, "Speed Reading with the Right Brain" by David Butler has become required reading when I work with players, particularly student-athletes whose balance of time management and reading comprehension is crucial to keeping them eligible.

Read the phrase, "the big black dog" and concentrate on imagining what this group of words mean. Imagine a big black dog, but don't only think of an image; think of what a big black dog means to you. Is it friendly? Is it scary? Is it beautiful? Do you remember any specific black dogs? Exactly what you imagine is not important—whatever pops in your head is OK. What is important, however, is that what comes to your head is an idea that you instantly identify the meaning of the phrase. This is thinking conceptually, as David Butler puts it in his book.



It's a simple concept, really. Read faster with better understanding. Now, here's the connection with hitting. Great hitters take in more information and access it quicker. They are able to receive information to and through the brain and turn it into a mechanical decision to swing.

For simplicity, I have listed the key components to right brain speed reading that I believe connects back to improved visual tracking habits the great eyes possess.

- Comprehension must come first, and therefore using your right conceptual brain is the key. It's great that you saw the pitch, but if you didn't calculate and comprehend where it was going to cross the plate, your seeing was of no value.
- The point of reading is to comprehend meaning. Old school speed reading methods push you to see more words per minute. Hitting drills that increase pitch velocity to triple digits with no "reading comprehension" as to where the pitch may be located is not the ultimate fix to improve in-game hitting.
- Increase the speed of transferring ideas from text to the brain. The great hitters process external visual cues quicker to their mechanics than others.
- Reading is essentially a mental activity, not a visual one. Right brain speed reading techniques strengthen the powers of concentration and focus.

Stay with me now. In simple terms, here is the connection to hitting and any other sport that requires visual processing.

- Poor or slumping hitters focus too hard on the ball and never see it in spatial terms. Slow readers lock in on one word at a time.
- Great athletes gauge ball flight in thoughtless silence. Speed reading is all about reading in silence.
- Good hitters anticipate and "steer" the ball's flight into their hitting zones with mostly smooth-pursuit eye movements. Speed reading is all about smooth pursuits and minimal sudden eye movements.
- Good hitters see more of where the ball is going and less of where it's been. Right brain speed reading is all about grouping words together and anticipating the next several words.
- Good hitters process ball flight with great awareness of the space surrounding the ball. Right brain speed reading requires looking at the sentences as a whole and using the text space as a signal to move.
- Good hitters use visualization as part of their practice and routines. Speed reading is premised on the reader "imagining and conceptualizing an idea from the text words."
- Great hitters are in a continuous hunt for information prior to making a decision. Speed reading is noticing connections between new and existing knowledge.

Is learning to speed read difficult? Like anything else in life that is valuable, it will take some time to go from an average reader of 200 words per minute to an advanced reader of 600-plus words per minute. As a fun starting point to speed reading, I've challenged several college programs and pro players to "read and react" to a series of balls on charts that require them to "imagine" and move quickly. Be creative and make your own visual speed reading challenges to replace the unproductive pregame rituals players sometimes fall into. One of the speed charts created for a former major leaguer is shown below with his arch enemy depicted in the background.



The cool thing about learning right brain speed reading? Worst-case scenario is that players become better readers with a better understanding and more time to hit the gym or do daily household chores. Best-case scenario is they've made an adjustment that may show up in the box score.