

Active Reading

by Diane Trautman

Have you ever read an entire page and then realized you had no idea what you just read? Your eyes were moving across the material, but your brain was miles away.

Most children get into bad reading habits, says Ty Devoe, a Saugus High English teacher and study skills coach. Instead of engaging in the text, they skim for answers. It's a practice that may get them through high school, according to Devoe, but it will create real problems once they reach college.

With skimming, the student is only looking for contextual clues to find information. He is not relating to the material emotionally or connecting it to knowledge he already holds. Nor is he thinking critically about where the information might lead. The human brain, Devoe states, remembers by relativity, connections, and bridges. Even if the student can retain facts and figures for the next day's tests, his memory will fail him when the final exam comes along because he doesn't know how each lesson has built upon the prior lesson.

Devoe relates reading to taking a driving trip. The student needs to conduct an overview to find out where she's going. She needs to look for the key ideas that provide her road map. She then engages in the journey by reading the text and connecting the ideas. She records her journey as she reads and then relates it to prior journeys. Finally, she will review her notes and organize her memories of the trip in ways that help her recall the information.

When we can't select our activities, such as with reading assignments, we have to learn ways to approach the material that will engage our minds and emotions and allow us to retain what we've read. A skilled tutor can help your child learn and practice techniques that can make reading easier, more enjoyable and more productive.