

A fun, illustrated guide to help the student athlete balance the competing demands of academics and sports. Teaches basic study skills and life balancing skills. Written specially for the college athlete with sport scholarship-the ScholAthlete.

SCHOLATHLETE'S SURVIVAL GUIDE: Essential Study Skills for the Scholar Athlete

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SCHOLATHLETE'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

**Essential
Study Skills
for the
Scholar Athlete**

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and
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5. Reading: A Fundamental Skill

One thing that should be very clear to you by now is that reading is **the single most fundamental**³² **skill** for succeeding in school and in life. Not only do you need this skill for learning the class material, you need it for exam success.

JJ: Years ago my youngest sister was living with me during her senior year in high school. I read one of her papers and unfortunately her writing was not up to the 12th grade level, so I suggested she read anything of her choice and then write a paper on it once every two weeks. I explained that if you can write about what you read then you truly understand it. That reading is not just saying the words, but understanding them and their context.

She didn't buy into my theory and didn't really try to improve. But when she got to college, she didn't place into freshman English, and had to take remedial English.

³² **Fundamental:** cardinal, serving as an essential component, being or involving basic facts or principles, “the fundamental laws of the universe.”

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She came back later and apologized. She wasted a semester studying remedial English because she hadn't tried to improve when I pointed out what she was lacking.

As was stated previously, reading is truly fundamental for standardized tests, all of which use the same multiple choice format. Each series of questions begins with a long fact pattern, followed by 1-5 questions about that fact pattern and 4 or 5 multiple choice answers for each question. Obviously, the student who reads quickly and accurately³³ will outperform those whose reading is more labored.³⁴

Reading—and her cousins Writing and Speaking—don't stop being important after school either. All white-collar jobs require good reading, writing and speaking skills, and even a manual laborer needs sufficient reading skills to review a

³³ **Accurate:** Conforming exactly or almost exactly to fact or to a standard, total correctness.

³⁴ **Labored:** produced or done with effort, lacking natural ease, strained, “the labored breathing of a dying man.”

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mortgage³⁵ or employment contract, set-up a retirement fund, and help his or her children with their homework.

JJ: I see the devastation³⁶ that illiteracy³⁷ reaps every day as a criminal defense lawyer. Most of my clients are in the criminal justice system in part because they can't read. They can't get good jobs because good jobs require literacy.³⁸ In many cases, low wage jobs won't pay the bills so my clients either self-medicate or turn to illegal activities for extra money. All told, the inability to read trapped many of them into a life of poverty and crime.

Therefore, the Reading, Writing and Speaking trio are critical to your success, and we have assumed that the average student could use some improvement in that area. If so, what can we do about our reading skills this late in the game?

³⁵ **Mortgage:** put up (usually a house or land) as security or collateral for a loan, a method by which persons can buy property without paying the full value up-front because the buyer pledges the property as security for the loan.

³⁶ **Devastation:** an event that results in total destruction, the state of being decayed or destroyed, "Katrina left New Orleans in a state of devastation."

³⁷ **Illiteracy:** the inability to read or write at a competent level.

³⁸ **Literacy:** the ability to read and write.

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Begin by candidly³⁹ evaluating⁴⁰ your reading skills. How would you rank your skills on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being excellent, 5 being average for your grade, and 1 being marginal?⁴¹ If you have no idea how to rate your skills, you may want to ask someone you trust and that has good skills to listen to you read and evaluate you. Or you can try an online evaluation of reading skills.⁴² That way you may have a more accurate idea of what your true level of reading comprehension⁴³ is. It is not enough to just be able to speak words out loud or in your head. You must also understand what the words are saying—the story they’re telling or the message they are conveying.⁴⁴

³⁹ **Candidly:** honestly, “candidly, I don’t think she has the talent.”

⁴⁰ **Evaluate:** to appraise, to judge the worth or quality, to assess.

⁴¹ **Marginal:** of extremely small merit, extremely small, “a marginal increase in speed can really increase your scores.”

⁴² See <http://www.test4free.com/> (up to grade 10) or <http://www.brainchild.com/gen/usmap.asp> (up to grade 8).

⁴³ **Comprehension:** an ability to understand the meaning or importance of something.

⁴⁴ **Convey:** make known, pass on information.

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JJ: Evaluate your reading honestly. The only way to solve a reading problem is to accept responsibility for whatever reading level you've reached. Once you identify your level, you can then develop a plan to improve your skills.

If you figure you are below 4, don't be embarrassed. You are NOT alone. Instead, view it as just another skill you need to practice, like laps to develop the perfect butterfly stroke. Practice, practice, practice will have you reading at a higher level, just like Michael Phelps practiced enough to win 8 gold medals at the 2008 Olympics.

Find a program specifically designed to improve your reading skills. There are many available, and several are available in software format, allowing you to improve your skills at your own pace and in privacy.

Some free material is available at the sites below, but web links decay⁴⁵ quickly, so just Google® "reading skills" or something similar and see what you find.

⁴⁵ **Decay**: the process of gradually becoming inferior, degrade.

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http://www.roadtoreading.org/	Free advanced reading course
http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/tiparchive.phtml/7	Offers weekly tips, free downloads and feature articles
http://www.tampareads.com/	Offers the first nine weeks of any grade level free
http://braindance.com/bdiread1.htm	Provides three ways to improve reading skills
http://www.managementhelp.org/prsn_dev/reading.htm	Links relating to reading including self assessment tests
http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/suggest.html	Suggestions for improving reading speed

Most student athletes will be somewhere about average in their reading skills. If you scored between four and seven, you should take every opportunity⁴⁶ to practice this critical skill!

*JJ: Reading is a skill that improves with practice. It doesn't matter what you read—newspaper articles, want ads, books, comics, Harry Potter, subtitles in movies—just **read!***

⁴⁶ **Opportunity**: a favorable or advantageous circumstance or combination of circumstances, a time or occasion that is suitable for a certain purpose.

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When you read out loud (and even in your head) make sure that you adjust or change your voice and speed at the punctuation⁴⁷ marks. Periods get a long pause and commas get a shorter pause. Your voice should rise at a question mark. It should get louder or more emphatic⁴⁸ at an exclamation mark! Reading to include the punctuation changes in voice and speed will increase your understanding of what you read.

One excellent way to practice reading skills is to read bedtime stories to younger siblings. Really! Work with us here . . .

Young children won't even know if your skills are less than stellar⁴⁹ because they can only compare against their own rudimentary⁵⁰ reading skills.

⁴⁷ **Punctuation:** the marks used to clarify meaning of the written words. Punctuation includes the period (.), comma (,), the question mark (?) and the exclamation (!), but there are many other punctuation symbols in addition to these four basic marks. Just look at your keyboard!

⁴⁸ **Emphatic:** spoken with emphasis, sudden and strong, “an emphatic NO!”

⁴⁹ **Stellar:** of or pertaining to stars, indicating the most important or best, “a stellar performance.”

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Read with feeling and do a different voice for each character. You may be a bit embarrassed at first, but these two techniques will help to improve your skills quickly. Of course, you may be living in a college dorm by now, and only rarely seeing your brothers and sisters. If that's the case, why not send them a weekly tape? It's good practice and it will thrill them!

If you are already "famous" and making public appearances, or if your athletic department has a community service program, consider visiting a children's cancer ward or a school and read to those children. You can pick your book in advance, practice before you go, and your improved skills and generosity may even be worthy of a newspaper or TV spot! It's great free press, and even the President does it!

You can also get together with your teammates or study buddies and read out loud in front of each other. This doesn't have to be explicitly⁵¹ about reading—you could simply read

⁵⁰ **Rudimentary**: being in the earliest stages of development, "rudimentary plans."

⁵¹ **Explicit**: precisely and clearly expressed or readily observable.
Explicitly: In an explicit manner.

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important paragraphs from your text books to help explain the material.

Another great way to improve your reading and speaking skills is to take a drama class. Not only is it an easy (and fun) grade, it will give you many opportunities to speak in public. Drama will also be of benefit if you're hoping to make the switch to sports announcer after your athletic career winds down! It may also help if you plan to be a business person and have to give presentations to grow your business or make a sales pitch.

As you practice your lines, be conscious⁵² of your diction⁵³—the way you pronounce⁵⁴ each word. An educated man can pronounce each consonant⁵⁵ clearly and distinctly. Try

⁵² **Conscious:** intentionally conceived, knowing and perceiving, having awareness of surroundings, sensations or thoughts, “he was conscious of his faults.”

⁵³ **Diction:** enunciation—the articulation of speech regarded from the point of view of its intelligibility to the audience.

⁵⁴ **Pronounce:** the way a word or a language is usually spoken.

⁵⁵ **Consonant:** a speech sound that is not a vowel.

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British roles—no one articulates⁵⁶ the consonants like the British!

Don't get us wrong, we're not denouncing⁵⁷ local accents. It's just that people do make judgments based on accent, as anyone with a thick Cockney, Irish burr or Southern drawl can attest.⁵⁸ No one would deny that Martin Luther King had an accent, but his diction was always clear and when he gave a speech, everyone understood him.

The average college student reads between 250 and 350 words per minute and a “good” reading speed is around 500 to 700 words per minute. Surprisingly, research has shown that an **increased** rate of reading actually improves reading comprehension, and that where speed has gone down,

⁵⁶ **Articulate:** pronounce, speak, or utter in a certain way, usually speaking each syllable clearly and precisely.

⁵⁷ **Denounce:** speak out against, stigmatize, to accuse or condemn or openly or formally or brand as disgraceful, “he denounced the Nazis.”

⁵⁸ **Attest:** provide evidence for, stand as proof of, show by one's behavior, attitude, or external attributes, “his high fever attested to his illness.”

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comprehension also decreased. Practice reading more quickly and see if it helps.

Something that might help you read more quickly is to read with an index card **above** the lines you have already read. The card will keep your eyes focused on the line you are reading, and you can push the card quickly down the page, forcing yourself to read quickly.

Another tip that can help you understand and remember what you read is to read with a **highlighter**⁵⁹ (of course, the books must be your own, and not a library copy). Highlight the important facts as you go. In general, you should not overuse the color, lest⁶⁰ it lose effectiveness, but if you do color copiously,⁶¹ add a red box around the most important information. You can also save the boxing for later review sessions.

⁵⁹ Fluorescent yellow highlighters do not photocopy. Therefore, if you want a clean copy of something you've highlighted, make sure you use fluorescent yellow.

⁶⁰ **Lest:** unless, in order that something might not happen.

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One thing that trips students up is unfamiliarity with the terminology⁶² or language of the subject material. In other words, you don't understand the words used in a certain area of study and this holds you back.⁶³ Nip this interference in the bud by starting each class with a good **glossary**.⁶⁴ Getting familiar with the words will not only improve your reading skills, but gain you significant yardage on the class materials as well.

JJ: Don't be embarrassed if you don't know a word. Just look it up. All it takes is not to know one word once and Murphy Jo's Law says that's the word that's going to show up on the test! Likewise, not knowing the meaning of one word in a sentence can change the whole meaning of that sentence.

⁶¹ **Copiously**: abundantly—in an abundant or profuse manner, “they were copiously supplied with food,” “he thanked her copiously.”

⁶² **Terminology**: words and/or phrases used to describe a concept or phenomenon.

⁶³ For example, your coach might tell you that “You must make sure your penultimate step is longer than your take-off.” You could never understand that coaching tip if you didn't know that “penultimate” means the “next to last.”

⁶⁴ **Glossary**: an alphabetical list of technical terms in some specialized field of knowledge, usually published as an appendix to a textbook.

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People used to laugh at me a because I had to know every word, even if it meant carrying around a dictionary. I got the last laugh though, as my success shows.

It takes courage to admit that you don't know something, but that courage is what it takes to get you through college.

Google® for “glossary” and whatever topic you are studying and copy a good glossary into your computer. Then you can add to it as the class proceeds. You can also share it with your study buddies.

TV: I had to take the Graduate Record Examinations® in biology and although as a biochemist I knew a little basic biology, I knew NOTHING about ecology or population biology, which was about two thirds of the exam. Just by learning a glossary from each topic (and by having awesome multiple choice exam skills) I was able to score in the top percentile, although I did have to try twice to get such a good grade.

Another tip that will help you to build a stronger vocabulary, is to invest⁶⁵ in a reading pen. This is a large

⁶⁵ **Invest:** to commit funds or resources to some project in the hoping of making a good return or profit from it.

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computerized pen that scans the text as you read and provides definitions of the scanned words on a small screen. It is much faster than looking words up in a dictionary, and understanding words is fully HALF the challenge of learning any subject. Reading pens start at about \$150 and go to \$250, and seem like a pretty good investment.⁶⁶

Several reading skill instructors suggest that you don't sound out every word as you read. The thinking is that it will slow you down.

TV: I am an excellent reader, and I always sound out the words as I read, probably because I am somewhat accustomed to learning through hearing, and I hear myself as I go.

However, we think you can talk way faster than you can read, and that you can sound out as you go. If you learn best through your ears, consider sounding out as you go. But don't sound out every word. Instead, simplify the passage as you read.

⁶⁶ **Investment:** money or time that is invested with an expectation of making profit or some other valuable return.

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Let us show you an example of a paragraph that might be quickly skimmed for its major points, saying (in your mind) only the key words or important points.

- The village of Vestmannaeyjar, in the far northern country of Iceland, is as bright and clean and up-to-date as any American or Canadian suburb. It is located on the island of Heimaey, just off the mainland. One January night in 1973, however, householders were shocked from their sleep. In some backyards red-hot liquid was spurting from the ground. Flaming “skyrockets” shot up and over the houses. The island’s volcano, Helgafell, silent for seven thousand years, was violently erupting!⁶⁷

This passage might be quickly read as:

- village of Vestmannaeyjar, northern country of Iceland, is bright, clean, up-to-date. Located on island of Heimaey, off mainland. January night in 1973...red-hot liquid spurting from ground... Flaming “skyrockets” shot over houses... The island’s volcano, Helgafell, silent for seven thousand years, violently erupting!

Let’s read it again, but this time circle or highlight what might be key words.

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- village of Vestmannaeyjar, northern country of Iceland, is bright, clean, up-to-date. Located on island of Heimaey, off mainland. January night in 1973...red-hot liquid spurting from ground... Flaming “skyrockets” shot over houses... island’s volcano, Helgafell, silent for seven thousand years, was violently erupting!

Now, we have read it twice very quickly, sounding out the major words, but leaving out meaningless connectors like “the.” We’ve also highlighted what might be important words, such as dates and places. Let’s try the sample reading comprehension questions:

The village is located on the island of:

- a) Vestmannaeyjar
- b) Hebrides
- c) Heimaey
- d) Helgafell
- e) Heimma

The color of the hot liquid was:

- a) orange
- b) black
- c) yellow

⁶⁷ Test question and answers excerpted from www.testprepreview.com.

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- d) red
- e) gray

This liquid was coming from the:

- a) mountains
- b) ground
- c) sea
- d) sky
- e) ocean

The island's volcano had been inactive for:

- a) seventy years
- b) seven thousand years
- c) seven thousand months
- d) seven hundred years
- e) seventy decades

The answers were c), d), b), and b). See how easy it was to quickly check the name of the village since it was underlined?

Let's try a harder one:

- WHAT WAS THE AMERICAN SMALL TOWN LIKE? I'm glad I was born soon enough to have seen the American small town, if not at its height, at least in the early days of decline into its present forlorn status as a conduit for cars and people, all headed for some Big City over the horizon. The small town was not always a stultifying trap for bright young people to escape from; in the years before wartime travel ("How're you gonna keep 'em down on the farm/After they've seen Paree?") and the scorn of the Menckens

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and Sinclair Lewises made the cities a magnet for farm boys and girls, the town of five to twenty thousand was a self-sufficient little city-state of its own.

- The main street of those Midwestern towns I remember from the thirties varied little from one place to another: there were always a number of brick Victorian buildings, labeled “Richard’s Block” or “Denman Block,” which housed, downstairs, the chief emporia of the town--the stores which made it a shire town for the surrounding farmlands. Each of these stores was run according to a very exact idea of the rules of its particular game. A hardware store, for instance, had to be densely hung inside with edged tools--scythes, sickles, saws--of all descriptions. It had to smell of oil, like metal, and often like the sacks of fertilizer stacked in the back room. It had to have unstained wood floors, sometimes sprinkled with sawdust, and high cabinets of small drawers containing bolts, screws, nails, and small plumbing accessories. It had to be owned and run by a middle-aged man in a blue apron, assisted by one up-and-coming young man and one part-time boy in his middle teens. It had to sell for cash on the barrelhead, and it did.
- The drugstore was a horse of a different color (and order), but it was circumscribed by equally strict rules. Here you would ask the white-coated (and often rimless-spectacled) druggist for aspirin or Four-Way Cold Tablets or Bromo-Seltzer, or perhaps for paramedical advice, which he was glad to give.

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- These towns are by and large gone in 1974, their old stores shut up with dusty windows, or combined, two or three at a time, to make a superette, a W.T. Grant store, or a sub-and-pizza parlor. The business has moved to the big shopping center on the Interstate or on to the city over the horizon, and the depopulated old towns drift along toward oblivion, centers of nothing in the middle of nowhere.⁶⁸

Let's read it quickly, sounding out the key words and highlighting what might be important words:

- born soon enough to seen American small town, if not at height, in early days of decline into present forlorn status as conduit for cars and people, headed for some Big City... small town not always stultifying trap for young people to escape from; years before wartime and scorn of Menckens and Sinclair Lewises made cities magnet for farm boys, town of five to twenty thousand was self-sufficient city-state ...
- main street of Midwestern towns from thirties varied little ... always brick Victorian buildings labeled "Richard's Block" or "Denman Block," housed, downstairs, chief emporia of town - stores which made it shire town for surrounding farmlands. Each store run by exact idea of rules... hardware store... densely hung with edged tools--scythes, sickles, saws... smell

⁶⁸ Questions excerpted from www.prometric.com. Text by L.E. Sissman in Selections From 119 Years of the Atlantic, © 1974.

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of oil, metal, sacks of fertilizer stacked in the back room. ... unstained wood floors, sprinkled with sawdust, high cabinets of small drawers containing bolts, screws, nails, and small plumbing accessories. ... owned and run by middle-aged man ... assisted by one ... young man and part-time boy in teens. had to sell for cash on the barrelhead...

- drugstore was ... different ... but ... equally strict rules. ... ask the white-coated .. rimless-spectacled druggist for aspirin or Four-Way Cold Tablets or Bromo-Seltzer, or paramedical advice... glad to give
- towns gone in 1974, old stores shut up with dusty windows, or combined to make a superette, a W.T. Grant store, or a sub-and-pizza parlor. business moved to shopping center on Interstate or to city and depopulated old towns drift toward oblivion, centers of nothing in middle of nowhere.

Now we'll try the reading comprehension questions:

1. According to the essay, what is the major reason for the decline of the American small town?
 - a) Cars made people more mobile
 - b) Lack of variation between towns drove people away
 - c) Big cities drew people away from the towns
 - d) Their main streets were all the same.
 - e) Writers criticized small town life.
2. How does the author feel about the American small town?

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- a) angry
- b) nostalgic
- c) spiteful
- d) embarrassed
- e) relieved

3. Given the descriptions of the small town stores, the author would most likely view modern shopping malls as places:

- a) catering to small town people
- b) taking over the role of small farm stores
- c) lacking the friendliness of small town stores
- d) providing variety to small town clients
- e) carrying on the tradition of small town stores

This was much harder because the text just sort of rambled,⁶⁹ and had a lot of descriptive material that wasn't particularly relevant to anything. Instead, the descriptions just gave you the flavor of how the author felt about small towns and their sad decline. The answers are c), b) and c).

How did you do?

⁶⁹ **Ramble:** to move about aimlessly, wander.

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Do you see how simplifying and underlined can help your reading comprehension? How underlining (or circling) can help you to easily double check a key fact? Great!

JJ: Here are a few rules I generally use when reading—underline or highlight 1) words I don't know, 2) words I can't pronounce, 3) names, 4) dates, and 5) what I think is the main idea. Afterwards, I immediately look up the definitions of the words I don't know and sound out the words I can't pronounce. The dictionary sometimes helps with pronunciation as well. I then try to get a better understanding of the passage I read.

Do the same with test questions. Nostalgic⁷⁰ is a word that jumped out to me as one word that some people may not have known. It turns out that nostalgic was the right answer to question 2. If you didn't know what it meant, you may have missed the answer for that reason.

Keep practicing. Remember, reading is the most important skill you'll use in college.

⁷⁰ **Nostalgic:** nostalgia describes a longing for the past, often idealized, “he was nostalgic for his Mother’s chicken soup.”

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