Skimming and Scanning

Skimming and **scanning** are very *rapid reading methods* in which you glance at a passage to find specific information.

These reading methods make it *easier* for you *to grasp large amounts of material*, especially when you're previewing.

How is skimming different to scanning?

The term **skimming** is often confused with **scanning**.

- You **skim** a text to obtain the **gist** – the overall sense – of a piece of writing.

- You scan a text to obtain **specific** information.

Skimming a text

Skimming is a reading technique that can help you:

- Read more quickly
- Decide if the text is interesting and whether you should read it in more detail
- Identify the main ideas in a text.

Don't assume that all pupils can skim and scan independently.

Tips for skim reading

Let your eyes skim over the surface of the text and look out for key words while thinking about any clues you've found about the subject.

1. Read the **title** – the shortest summary of content
2. Read the **introduction** or the **first paragraph**.
3. Read the **first sentence** of every paragraph.
4. Read **headings**, **subheadings**, **sources** and **illustrations**
5. Look at any **pictures**, **charts**, or **graphs**.
6. Look for any **italicized**, **boldface** or **underlined** words or phrases.
7. Read the **summary** or **last paragraph**.

Scanning

- Focus on the **specific** information you are looking for.

- Try to **anticipate** how the answer will appear and what **clues** you might use to help you locate the answer. For example, if you were looking for a certain date, you would quickly read the paragraph looking only for numbers.

- Use **headings** and any other aids that will help you **identify** which sections of the text might contain the **information** you are looking for.

- Read **selectively** and skip through sections of the text.

Tips for scanning

- Don't try to read every word. Let your eyes move quickly across the page until you find what you're looking for.
- Use clues on the page, such as headings and titles, to help you.
- Focus on the key words in a question.

Skimming or scanning?

If you are ever asked whether you would rather live in a past century, you would be wise to consider the problem of ill health before answering. How much better to live at a time in which, when you fall sick, you go to a doctor or a surgeon and get well again. It has to be said: the prime reason to avoid medieval times is sickness.

What does the word *prime* indicate in the first paragraph?

Tick **one**

The sickness in medieval times was natural. ☐
Medieval people were better at avoiding disease. ☐
People were just starting to learn about sickness in medieval times. ☐
There was more than one disadvantage to living in medieval times. ☐

Skimming or scanning?

Why might you fall ill? There are, of course, many reasons. Not least is the likelihood that you will be struck by a blade, an arrow, a staff or even a cannon ball. The violence inherent in society, coupled with a near-complete disregard for what we think of as health and safety, means that serious injuries are very common…

…*serious injuries are very common*

Look at paragraph three.

Find and **copy one** other word that tells the reader that violence was a normal part of life in the fourteenth century.

National Reading Test Example

Welcome to medieval times

If you are ever asked whether you would rather live in a past century, you would be wise to consider the problem of ill health before answering. How much better to live at a time in which, when you fall sick, you go to a doctor or a surgeon and get well again. It has to be said: the prime reason to avoid medieval times is sickness.

In almost every respect fourteenth-century life is unhealthy compared to our own. True, there are no exhaust fumes in the streets to pollute your lungs, and no tobacco smoke for that matter either; but there are open fires in many houses and the exposure to smoke for so much of the year causes lung diseases of a similar nature. There may be no fish-killing chemicals accidentally released by pharmaceutical companies into the rivers, but there are all sorts of other things which get into the water supply, from overflowing cesspits to dead animals. Children do not suffer from allergic reactions caused by dust in wall-to-wall carpeting or the excessive use of cleaning fluids, but you can hardly say that that is a good thing when nearly half of them do not live to adulthood.

Why might you fall ill? There are, of course, many reasons. Not least is the likelihood that you will be struck by a blade, an arrow, a staff or even a cannon ball. The violence inherent in society, coupled with a near-complete disregard for what we think of as health and safety, means that serious injuries are very common. In addition, even where such injuries are not fatal, poor knowledge of medicine and hygiene means that blood poisoning often leads to death or the amputation of a limb. There is very little understanding of how diseases spread or how the body functions. Hospital staff often put seriously ill people in one bed together, even when they are suffering from infectious illnesses. Germ theory is unknown. The circulation of the blood is a complete mystery. If you are found in a comatose state in 1300, no one will check your pulse to see whether you are still alive; instead they will place a bowl of water on your chest to see if you are still breathing.

Medieval life might be unhealthy, but some medieval medical concepts are unhealthier still.

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1 What opinion is suggested by the writer in the first paragraph?

Tick **one**.

Medieval people were less intelligent than people today.	☐
Only healthy people would want to live in the fourteenth century.	☐
Health care was poorer in the past centuries.	☐
People were more concerned about their health in medieval times.	☐

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2 What does the word *prime* indicate in the first paragraph?

Tick **one**.

The sickness in medieval times was natural.	☐
Medieval people were better at avoiding disease.	☐
People were just starting to learn about sickness in medieval times.	☐
There was more than one disadvantage to living in medieval times.	☐

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3 Complete the table below to show whether the following health issues mentioned in the text relate to **medieval** times or **modern** times.

	Medieval	Modern
tobacco smoke		
overflowing cesspits		
dust allergies		
open fires		
exhaust fumes		

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please turn over

Skimming or scanning?

Put ticks to show which statements are **true** and which are **false**.

	True	False
People were unaware of how illnesses were passed on in medieval times.		
Fourteenth-century doctors checked their patients' pulse using a bowl of water.		
Modern-day water supplies are free from pollution.		
Medieval fighting injuries always ended in death.		
Modern-day people may suffer illnesses caused by their choice of floor covering		

Skimming or scanning?

Put ticks to show whether each statement relates to **medieval times** or to **modern times** or to both.

	Medieval times	Modern times	Both
Almost half the people die in childhood.			
When you fall sick you seek medical treatment.			
Information about circulation is unknown.			
Medical staff understand germ theory.			
Allergic reactions are caused by cleaning fluids.			

Remember

- Skim to get the **gist** or the **main ideas** of the text.

- Scan the text to find a **specific** piece of **information**.

What next?

- Give pupils the **opportunity** to practise skimming and scanning texts during reading activities.
- The techniques can be used with a range of different types of text.
- Try to explain the **process** and the **purpose** of the technique that you want the pupils to use.