

Speed Reading and Memory Enhancement

Jim Kwik



Jim Kwik, a learning and memory expert, is co-founder and executive trainer of Kwik Learning, LLC, a New York-based training and consulting firm that specializes in helping professionals and organizations achieve greater success through rapid learning. For more than 10 years, he has taught memory enhancement, speed reading and advanced thinking skills, and he is the author of training programs, manuals and articles. A member of the American Society for Training and Development, Kwik recently was honored by the Business Council of Westchester as one of 2004's Rising Stars — 40 Under 40.

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How many feel they have too much to read and too little time? Who would like to have a better memory? Have you ever forgotten someone's name seconds after you heard it?

Let's start with my name; it's pretty easy to remember. My name is Jim Kwik, co-founder of *Kwik Learning*; I help top professionals to learn kwikly. The question I always receive, whether on the radio, on stage or in a boardroom is about my last name. My last name really is Kwik, I did not change it to do this business. I have to always carry with me a copy of my birth certificate. With a name like Kwik, my life was pretty much laid out. I had to be runner, I've received my fair share of speeding tickets, and I teach people how to read and remember quickly. And that's what I've done now for over a decade. My corporate speed-reading program trains professionals to read 4, 5, even 8 times faster with greater focus and comprehension. My memory training programs and products show top business leaders how to remember vital business information in just seconds. This includes things like names, faces, numbers, formulas, facts, figures, procedures, speeches, sales scripts, client/product information and other vital material. What I'm going to do this morning is share with you some of the fundamental basics of our speed-reading program (called Kwik Reading) and memory improvement program (called Kwik Recall). You will see how these two skills can create a powerful synergy that will lead to greater success and less stress in your business and in your life.

Let's first start off with Kwik Reading.

How many people have books on their shelf they have not read yet?

Does anyone receive more than five emails a day?

How many people suffer with too much to read and too little time? (Books, newspapers, magazines, journals, mail, memos, faxes, email, reports, trade publications, technical reading)

How important is it to stay current with company, business, and industry information?

Researchers say the amount of information in the world now doubles every few years. But how we learn the information (read and recall) is exactly the same. That

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gap creates what doctors call “information anxiety.” Let’s talk about mastering this information overload.

Has anyone ever taken a speed-reading course before? Most programs focus on teaching scanning, skipping words and getting the “gist” of it. Since I started as a memory trainer, I believe comprehension and retention are critical components to reading. Kwik Reading is not about skimming. My clients include top corporations, medical doctors, attorneys, and financial advisors. Would you feel comfortable knowing your doctor, lawyer or financial advisor just got the “gist” of their reading?

You know in business you can’t manage something if you can’t measure it. The first thing I would recommend everyone do is to give yourself a reading assessment. Reading speed is measured in the same way as typing speed, in words per minute. The average reading speed of an adult is about 200-300 wpm. How fast is possible? To give you an idea, in four short sessions, over less than 30 days, we graduate clients with an average reading speed increase of 455% (anywhere from 500 wpm to 1400+ wpm) WITH better comprehension. Northwestern University research sets the limit at about 1800 wpm.

So now that you have a baseline and know what’s possible, there are two parts to reading efficiency. There’s reading speed and reading comprehension. We can agree it doesn’t make sense to have one without the other. There’s a Woody Allen quote that says, “I took a speed reading course. I read War & Peace. It’s about Russia!”

If you want to be a faster and better reader, you must overcome and be aware of five main obstacles.

First Obstacle is “Lack of Education.” Were you born with the ability to read? No. Reading is a skill, and like all skills, can be improved. Yet when was the last time you took a class called “reading?” You were probably about 8 years old. Now has the amount and difficulty of reading you need to process increased just a little since then? Yet most of us are reading exactly the same way. It’s no wonder we are so stressed. It’s like we’re living in a high-tech age of jets and spacecraft and driving a horse and buggy.

Second Obstacle is “Lack of Focus.” This is a big one. How many people have trouble concentrating while

reading? Do you every get distracted? Have you ever read a page in a book and then forgot what you just read? Why do we lose focus? They say the human brain is the most powerful computer on the planet. Yet when we read, we feed this supercomputer one ... word ... at ... a ... time. So slowly we starve our brain. And if you do not give your mind the stimulus it needs, will it seek entertainment elsewhere? Absolutely, in the form of distraction. Now there is a myth out there that fast readers comprehend less. This is not true. Faster readers have greater comprehension because they have better focus. It’s like driving. Who’s more focused on driving, you at 30 mph or a racecar driver at 220 mph? The racecar driver is probably not thinking, “Did I pick up my dry cleaning?” Greater speed leads to greater focus, which leads to greater comprehension.

Third Obstacle is “Subvocalization.” This is by far the greatest obstacle that needs to be overcome. If you know someone who took a speed-reading class that didn’t work long term, it’s likely due to subvocalization. What is subvocalization? Do you notice that inner voice you hear while you read? That’s subvocalization. The reason it’s an obstacle is that if you need to say every word in order to understand it, you can’t read any faster than you can speak. That means your reading speed is limited to your talking speed, and not your thinking speed. Now do you need to say a word like “computer” to understand what it means? No, you don’t. While driving, when you see a red sign with 8 sides, how many of you actually say the word “STOP” to yourself? You comprehend with your mind, not your tongue.

Fourth Obstacle is “Regression.” How many people find they sometimes go back and reread words. Reading regression is the act of backskipping. Researchers say up to 30% of our time can be spent wasted in regression.

Fifth Obstacle is “Belief.” Henry Ford said that “If you believe you can or believe you can’t either way you are right.” Roger Banister in 1954 did a similar exercise to do something no one in human history was able to do; break the 4-minute mile. What’s even more interesting is what happened the next few years. Dozens of runners broke the

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4-minute mile, because one person changed the belief of what's possible. Beliefs create our reality. Do people have beliefs about how much they are worth financially? Do people have beliefs about how smart they are? Our results in life, both good and bad, are rooted in our beliefs.

Now how do we overcome some of these obstacles?

I'm a believer of combining research theory and real world application. In addition to basing our high performance methods on the latest brain and adult learning research, I've also spent time with some of the best minds, fastest readers, and world-class memorizers. One of the principals of Kwik Learning is that genius can be learned, that people who learn quickly have strategies of thinking and behaving that others don't. Once you learn those specific strategies, you can achieve those results. It's called modeling. Do what successful people do, and reap similar rewards.

At what stage of life are you the quickest learner? The answer is as a child. So if you are going to model genius, one of the best places to start is with children. When you watch a child learn to read, most of them naturally use part of their body to help them to focus. What do they use? Right, their finger. Now school generally does not encouraged the use of your hand while reading, but test this for yourself. Read the same material you read for your assessment, but this time with your finger and compare the results. Research indicates that you can improve your reading speed 25 – 50% on average by using what they call a “visual aid” (your finger, a pen, pencil, highlighter, etc.). Is a 25 – 50% increase in productivity and efficiency valuable? For successful people, time is their most precious resource. Reading takes time and time is money.

One of the most effective ways to become a Kwik Reader is to teach your hands to assist your eyes in taking in more words, more rapidly. There are a number of reasons why using a visual aid helps reading speed. First, it's interesting children naturally do it. Second, most of you do it. You don't read with your finger, but when asked to count the number of words and lines you just read, everyone uses their finger or pen. Third, your eyes are naturally attracted to movement. While your finger moves through the page

underlining the words, your eyes naturally want to follow the motion, thus you have better focus (obstacle #2) and spend less time regressing (obstacle #4). Fourth, certain senses work very closely together. For example, your sense of taste and smell are very closely linked (when you think you are tasting a peach, you are actually smelling it). Just like taste and smell, your sense of sight and touch are very closely connected. Those that use their finger while they read report they feel more “in touch” with their reading, thus helping with comprehension.

Now your brain also plays an important role in reading. Your brain has two sides, a left and a right side. Brain scientists say each side has certain functions. The left side deals with processes like logic, analysis, words, language, and sounds. The right side deals with processes like creativity, imagination, relationships, visualization, and emotions. As you might think, for most people reading is primarily a left-brain process (made of words, language, and sounds). The right brain if employed to a greater degree, can greatly improve speed and comprehension. So you are not only hearing the words (left brain), but also visualizing, imagining, feeling and experiencing the meaning (right brain). Thus the more of your whole brain (both left and right) you use, the greater your reading results.

Now knowing this, which hand do you think I would recommend you use while reading? I'll give you a hint; there are only 2 choices. I would practice with the left at first. Why? Right, because of what you learned in high school science, that one side of the brain controls the opposite side of the body and visa versa. What research is now supporting is that it is not only one-way (mind affects the body), but also two-way (body affects the mind). Using your left hand while reading may actually stimulate and engage the right side of your brain, which is critical for effective reading speed and comprehension. Now while reading, you have the left-brain words and right-brain pictures. By the way, what's a picture worth? A thousand words, and that's a lot of comprehension!

One of the greatest advantages of this eye-hand reading technique is its flexibility. There are three primary ways of using your finger (called hand motion methods):

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the Single Line Method, the “S” Method, and the Center Method.

The hand motion you choose can vary depending on your purpose and preference. For example, you may prefer to use the “Center Method” hand motion for reading a newspaper and the “Single Line Method” for a technical manual you really need to study, retain and absorb.

Now take out a piece of paper and number it 1-20. I’m going to do a quick memory demonstration. I’d like you to give me a list of 20 words that I’ll do my best to memorize. Raise your hand, and say the number and word. For example, “#1 is giraffe, #2 is insurance, #3 is the Statue of Liberty, etc. When you’ve given me all 20 words, I’ll see how many I can recall. If I do it successfully, I will show you how to apply similar principles to remembering names and faces in business. Now to make it a little more difficult, give me the list in random order like, “#18 is Wall Street, #5 is pepperoni pizza, #13 is Mount Everest, etc.” I do this demonstration, not to impress you, but to impress upon you what is possible. Notice the speed at which you can recall random information. It’s also very long term, if you called me up two weeks from now, I’ll still recall 95% of the list. These techniques can be applied to everything from names and numbers to speeches and scripts to product information and playing cards.

Let’s talk about developing your Kwik Recall. How many people want to improve their memory? How many people feel senior moments are coming a little early? Have you ever walked into a room and forgot why you’re there? Ever misplace items, like an important document, your wallet/purse, keys or even your car? Do you ever have to look up phone numbers you call every week or stress over a speech you’re afraid you will forget? I believe the two most costly words in business is “I Forgot.” I forgot to do it, I forgot to bring it, I forgot the meeting, or probably the most damaging one ... I forgot your name.

How important is it to remember names and faces in business? How do you think people feel when you forget their name? Right, they feel unimportant, maybe like you don’t even care. Let me ask you a question, how can we expect a potential client to believe we will care for their

business, if we don’t care enough to remember their name? You are all familiar with the quote, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Having quick recall of names can be considered the heart (and start) of good business.

Before we get started, you need to know there is no such thing as a good or bad memory, just a trained and an untrained memory. You can grow older, yet your mind can become better. Today’s science says your memory is like a muscle, it grows stronger with use. Today we’re in the mental gym, and I’ll be your personal memory fitness trainer. Let’s get started.

The first acronym I want you to remember to recall more names is **M.O.M.**

“M” is for Motivation. If I told you that there are ten people in the next room, one of whom has \$20,000 cash for you or your favorite charity IF you correctly recall their name, how many names do you think you would remember? Remember everyone’s favorite radio station: WII-FM (What’s In It For Me). Ask yourself, “Why do I want to remember this person’s name?”

“O” is for Observation. Often recalling names is not a matter of RETENTION, but more of a matter of ATTENTION. Just as you can’t remember the face of someone whom you didn’t see, you can’t remember a name you didn’t hear in the first place. When meeting a new person, take a moment to quiet your self-talk and really listen.

“M” is for Mechanics. Mechanics are the Kwik Recall techniques we teach in our classes and products to be an expert in remembering names. The reason why mechanics comes last is because if you don’t have the **motivation** to remember a person’s name, or you don’t **observe** the name in the first place, all the best mechanics won’t help.

Now for some mechanics. To remember more names and faces, **BE DR. SUAVE.**

“B” is for Belief. Remember “If you believe you can or can’t, either way you’re right.” You need to monitor your self-talk. I ran a marathon a couple of years ago, and read a book on it. It said, “Your mind is like a computer, and your self-talk is the program it will run.” If you say to yourself,

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"I'm not good with names," you have just programmed yourself to forget the next name you hear. Minimize negative self-talk. Your memory can be better than you think. Remember what Earl Nightingale said, "What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

"E" is for Exercise. Like anything in life worth having, remembering names in the beginning takes effort, until it's a habit and becomes second nature. The bad news is this takes practice; the good news is it does not take as much as you think. Remember practice does not make perfect, it makes permanent.

"D" is for Decide. If you really decided to remember the next name you heard, would you? Your chances would definitely increase.

"R" is for Relax. Stress is a major obstacle to memory. Deep breathing, restful sleep, yoga, monitoring your self-talk, are all good methods for controlling stress levels.

"S" is for Say it. "Hi Ed, nice to meet you." Just by saying the name and hearing it again increases your odds of recalling it. Also by saying the name, it means you observed it correctly. What if the person's name is "Ted" and not "Ed," but you did not hear it clearly? When is it better to be corrected, at the start of a conversation or twenty minutes later when you say "Goodbye, Ed."

"U" is for Use it. Use the name intelligently three or four times within the context of the conversation. Note: Use it, do not AB-Use it. Using it more than four times can be an abuse.

"A" is for Ask. Asking is great for unusual and unique names. "That's a great name, how do you spell that?" or "What's the origin?" Remember everyone's favorite subject is himself or herself. I did a corporate training for a large company in your industry; the training director's name was "Nankita." I said, "That's a beautiful name, does it mean something in another language?" She said, "It means Graceful Falling Waters." I asked a room full of her coworkers, "Who knew that about her?" How many people do you think raised their hands? Right, not a single one.

"V" is for Visualize. Recalling what we spoke about left and right brain. A name is a left-brain word, but it has no right-brain picture. This is a basic technique where

you take the person's name and turn it into a "reminder picture" and connect it to the person for greater recall. For example you meet a "Mike." What can you picture? Of course, him singing on a "Microphone." You meet "Mary," and visualize she's carrying two lambs under each arm (Mary had a little lamb.) You meet "Mat," and you imagine using his hair as a welcome mat. Note: You do this in the privacy of your own mind. I agree it sounds strange, funny and even a little ludicrous ... but isn't that what we tend to remember? There is a reminder picture for practically every name you meet, I know because for one of our audio products I took the top 500 of both the most common male and female names in the country and came up with a picture for everyone. You can do the same. So if you meet a "John," you can picture what?

"E" is for End. Always end a conversation or meeting by saying goodbye using that person's name. One of the greatest first impression skills ever developed is the ability to meet a person and remember his or her name. When you have the ability to enter a room, confidently meet 20 or more new people and leave saying good-bye to every one of them by name, who will they all remember ... You. And that's a standout skill in business!

And on that "end" note, it looks like we're out of time. If you would like to reference more helpful ideas regarding speed-reading or memory improvement, you may visit the articles on our website, www.KwikLearning.com. I want to thank you and MDRT for having me this morning. I always consider it a privilege to work with the very best of the best. The main idea to walk away with this morning is that in today's competitive information age, mind power has replaced muscle power. Your mind is your most valuable wealth-building asset and the more you can learn, the more you can earn. Those professionals that can learn quicker than the competition have an unbelievable advantage in both business and in life. Knowledge is power to the degree we apply it. Create "mental synergy" by using some of the reading and memory tips we discussed this morning and may you have many *memorable* successes this year! Thank you and enjoy the rest of the conference.