Skimming & Scanning Strategy Protocol

What is “Skimming & Scanning”?

Skimming & Scanning is a style of reading and information processing. There are some who argue that skimming and scanning is more of a searching technique than a reading strategy. But it all depends on the purpose for reading. For example, one could read for pure enjoyment, while in another situation, one could read for inquiring about information or to successfully complete a proposed activity/task.

What is “skimming?”

It is a strategy that can be taught to students to help them identify the main ideas in text. It is important to correlate “skimming” to reading, making it clear that it is not word-by-word reading. Rather it is three to four times faster than normal reading. Generally, skimming is used to get through text very quickly. Consequently, skimming is used when students have a lot of reading material to get through, or have been assigned a task in an activity that requires some quick reading first, prior to completing the task. Skimming has also been used as a strategy in research when the student wants to determine if a text/article is a resource than can be used.

How is skimming done?

When seeking specific information related to a topic/theme or an answer to a question or a prompt, it is best to employ skimming. The skill of skimming allows for you to read the headings, titles, subheadings and illustrations with captions, as well as reading the first and last paragraph of a text/article. Indeed, skimming works well to identify dates, names, places or specific items. It also allows for the reader to quickly review charts, tables and graphs.

What is “scanning?”

Scanning is a skill that allows for students to search for key words/concepts/ideas. More often than not, the student knows exactly what he/she is looking for. So the assigned task is finding out specific information, such as finding the name of an individual in a telephone directory or looking for a word in a dictionary.

How is scanning done?

When a student is asked to employ scanning in a task, this process involves moving the eyes quickly through the text (or down a page) looking for specific words and/or phrases. Scanning can also be used in a research project, where the student can scan the text to determine whether it will provide the information he/she is looking for. It is important to note, once you have scanned a text, you might go back and skim the text to identify the main ideas.

Remember to emphasize with your students that scanning involves using the author’s use of organizer’s (i.e., numbers, letters, steps, or the sequence words of First, Second, Third…You can also encourage your students to look for words that are bold faced, italicized or in a different font size, style or color. It is also important to point out that authors can place important information in the text’s margin.