



Highlights from this issue

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I've done quite a lot of reading recently. I suspect quite a few of you have too. There are a few things that strike me about reading, which I thought I'd write about here.

The first is my casual competence at reading. Reading is a skill I took years to acquire. However, now I take it for granted that I can glance at something simple—a road sign, a book spine—and absorb the meaning nearly immediately. I can spend days or weeks being unconscious of my competence, only jolted into consciousness when a meaning becomes unclear or confusing.

The second is how pervasive reading is. Many bemoan that some young folk don't spend much time reading but huge segments of social media are delivered in a written format. Unless you are restricting yourself to Tiktok or You Tube you will be reading, probably lots. Of course, there are endless debates about the quality of reading, but I'm not sure we need to be too worried about the fundamental act of converting written symbols into understanding.

The third thing is my increasing understanding of how people read. There are important distinctions here. Compare reading for pleasure—reading a novel for example—with reading for information. Many people assume that these tasks are approached the same but they are undertaken very

differently. In the first, if the book is any good you start with the first word and you proceed, in a mostly orderly fashion, through the sentences, paragraphs, pages and chapters to the last word. At the other end of reading, for information, in most instances the reader is looking for shortcuts, and if they're not given them, they will invent them. They will read the first parts of paragraphs to try to find out if they want to spend time on the rest, and will give themselves permission to skip ahead or miss out entirely if they can. Tim Albert covers this well in his books, and emphasises that it is worth putting time and effort into everything you write, from an email to a patient letter to a text, to ensure that your meaning comes across to someone who reads in this manner.

And so lastly, for now, reading for understanding medicine. Sinead McGlacken-Byrne, Mark O'Rahelly, Peter Cantillon and Nicholas Allen examine that old fashioned structure, the journal club (*see page 236*). I'm sure we've all formed an image, at phases in our career, as everyone else involved sitting, quietly, and absorbing the erudite wisdom seeping out of the pages of a paper. We imagine that there can be no way that everyone else is doing it like we are, scrabbling to read on the bus on the way to work, or propping up our eyelids with matchsticks and wondering why

we've read the same paragraph four times. This tells me a few things. It tells me that we need to be kinder to ourselves, and recognise that very few people read all of everything in this idealised way. It tells me that I need to work hard with authors to ensure that their articles are as engaging and readable as possible. And it also tells me that competence at science and medicine reading in a busy life with so much information is a learnt skill. As with any other skill it takes time and practice, which journal clubs are an excellent format for. I've been involved with a number of journal clubs over the years, with varying levels of success. It seems to me that the most successful ones were based on strong personality or persistence of some of the members—and if you wanted to set one up, or, in this highly digital era, bolster yours, you should read this paper. It's this month's editor's choice.

I'd be really interested to hear your experience with journal clubs, especially in the digital, distanced era. Remember you can leave eLetter responses to all of our articles. Meantime, enjoy reading this month's journal and take a few seconds to just notice how you are reading it.

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