The key findings!

1. People read a high volume of story text in both print and online.

Most surprising: A much larger percentage of story text was read, on average, online than in print:

77% online
62% in broadsheet
57% in tabloid

And, nearly two-thirds of online readers, once they chose a particular item to read, read ALL of the text.

Story text in tabloid jumps was read more than in broadsheet. The average read was:

68% of tabloid jumps
59% of broadsheet

2. People read two ways: methodically or scanning.

About 75 percent of print readers are methodical. Online readers are different: half are methodical, while the other half are scanners.

But whether online readers were methodical or scanners, they read about the same volume of story text.

3. Alternative story forms – like Q&As, timelines, short sidebars and lists – help readers understand.

Our prototype test showed that more questions were answered correctly about a story presented in an alternative manner in print and online – with no traditional narrative.

In the eye tracking test of the daily publications, subjects paid an average of 15 percent more attention to alternative story forms than to regular story text in print. In broadsheet, this figure rose to 30 percent.

4. Bigger heads and photos attract print readers; but directional elements draw online readers.

Large headlines and photos in print were looked at first and got dramatically more attention than smaller ones. But online, readers went for navigation bars and teasers.

5. Photos get a lot of attention in print.

Documentary news photos — photos of real people doing things in real time — got more attention than staged or studio photographs.

Color photos received more attention than black and white in broadsheet. Mugshots got relatively little attention.

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online & print and

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HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY FINDINGS FOR PRINT AND ONLINE

About Poynter EyeTrack07

Why has Poynter done this study now?

We wanted to take a scientific look at how people navigate through news in various story forms — and how these forms differ in broadsheet, tabloid and online. Editors and publishers have asked for specific information about this as they make decisions about where to put their resources and how to tell compelling stories most effectively.

How does this study differ from previous Poynter studies?

This is the first study to compare both print and online. With more than 600 test subjects, EyeTrack07 is the largest study Poynter has undertaken. Subjects came in for one test and were asked to read that day's edition of the publication.

Who paid for this study?

Poynter has funded more than two-thirds of the study; the participating news organizations paid the balance.

Which news organizations were studied?

Two tabloids:
Rocky Mountain News
Philadelphia Daily News
Two broadsheets:
St. Petersburg Times
Star Tribune of Minneapolis
Two news Web sites:
St. Petersburg Times
Star Tribune of Minneapolis

How does the equipment work?

Two small cameras are mounted above the subject's right eye. One records the position of the eye as it is reflected in a small monocle. The other camera records what the subject is viewing. These two images are married to create a video that superimposes a crosshair over the newspaper or monitor. The crosshair is a mathematical representation of the position of the cornea. As the subject reads, the crosshair follows his or her gaze.

Doesn't the eyewear get in the way of a normal reading experience?

Certainly, the reading experience isn't the same as if the person were sitting in their living room or at a coffee shop. But because this was a scientific study, there were certain controls we had to have in place. Each subject was asked to sit comfortably and to read as he or she would normally. The mobility of this particular equipment allowed them to move freely, to sit back in the chair, to raise or lower the newspaper, etc.

JIM STEM / THE POYNTER INSTITUTE

Most subjects said they were aware of the headgear, but that it was not a significant distraction from their normal reading experience.

Who was tested?

49% men
51% women

56%	18-41 years of age
44%	42-60 years of age

29% read print or online editions 1-3 times a week.

71% read print or online editions 4 or more times a week.

How long were people asked to read?

No time limit was specified when they began the test. Each subject knew they would spend as much as 90 minutes with us. Subjects were given identical instructions, in which we told them to read as long as they would normally, or until they were asked to stop – whichever came first.

Ultimately, we did stop them after 15 minutes of reading the live newspaper or news site. The time limit we chose was based on the volume of data that would have to be viewed and processed later. In general, each minute of recorded test required as many as ten minutes to process and code.

Did you tell the subjects what to read?

No. They were allowed to read whatever they liked. We did ask them to refrain from reading the classifieds, as this was not our focus.

What elements were tracked, exactly?

The list of more than 350 specific elements included captions, headlines, photographs, graphics, briefs, stories, obituaries, sports and agate listings, blogs, podcasts and more. We also made note of whether or not the elements were packaged together.

How did you test comprehension?

An exit interview was used to help determine comprehension and retention using questions about a set of prototypes.

How were the prototypes used?

Six versions of a story were carefully edited and designed so that they contained exactly the same information – fact for fact. Three prototypes were print; three were online.

The first version of both print and online was fairly simple: headline, written narrative and photograph. The second version was more graphic. The third version was very visual, with no traditional narrative.

Will Poynter do more testing?

Yes! We see a lot more out there that needs to be tested in print, broadcast and online. We are interested in future eye tracking studies, and we're looking for partners.

We'd like to take a look at:

- News delivery on large format screens, in high definition and smaller screens.
- Moving text and animated graphics in broadcast news.
- Major innovation in searchability and interactivity online.

We're interested in hearing your ideas. Contact Sara Quinn at squinn@poynter.org or Pegie Stark Adam at pstark@poynter.org

How can I find out more?

Attend the EyeTrack07 conference at Poynter, April 10-12, 2007. To register, contact Jessica Sandler at jsandler@poynter.org.

Check Poynter Online for coverage of the conference.

Reserve a copy of the EyeTrack07 Report at: eyetrack.poynter.org.