**FAST PACING**

According to James V. Smith in his book *The Writer’s Little Helper* ©2006, bestsellers have a pacing REI (Reading Ease Index) of no lower than 65 in any chapter. He describes how to obtain the REI for any piece of writing by using the readability tools that come with Microsoft Word. (Click the checkbox in preferences and any time you run spell check, Word will produce the report.)

**REI Guidelines**

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|  | **REI Based on Bestseller** |
| **Words per sentence** | 15 max |
| **Characters per word** | 4.5 max |
| **Passive voice** | < 5% |
| **Flesch Reading Ease** | 80 minimum |
| **Flesch-Kincaid Level** | 6 max |
| **Pacing Composite\*** | >65 |

\*Pacing composite is calculated by taking the Flesch Reading Ease score and subtracting the Flesh-Kincaid Level. The ideal example above would be 80 - 6 = 74.

**Pacing Guidelines**

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| **Level of Pacing** | **REI Composite Score Range** |
| Breakneck (red zone) | > 86 |
| Thriller (orange zone) | 80-85 |
| Compelling (green zone) | 74-79 |
| Downshift/breather (blue zone) | 65-73 |

Again, these numbers are based on national bestsellers and not literary fiction.

**To slow the pacing:**

* Lengthen your sentences, paragraphs and chapters.
* Increase the length and number of descriptions.
* Include more introspection and less action.
* Use Latinates (see definition below) when appropriate. (Ruminate vs. think)

**To increase the pacing:**

* Shorten your sentences, paragraphs, and increase dialog.
* Use stronger/precise verbs that do not require a preposition (e.g. to check out can mean to ogle a girl, leave a hotel, take a book from a library, or die) or an adverb (e.g. walked quickly vs. dashed).
* Avoid passive voice.
* Eliminate reflection/pontification. (Do not discuss the fine points of Descartes while being chased by a rabid grizzly bear.)
* Reduce description by going with the five senses directly. (Avoid filter verbs: he felt searing pain in his leg. His leg burned.)

Be sure the pacing matches the action and emotional tone (e.g. awe will be slow but fear will be fast). Slow down and speed up as the action or tension dictates. Also verify that the pacing changes throughout the piece. Too fast-paced and you wear out your reader and too slow will put them to sleep.

**Latinate words** have multiple syllables, and their meanings tend to be more broad, abstract, or scientific. In contrast, Germanic words are often monosyllabic, and their meanings are concrete, limited, and blunt.