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# 14

# Reading

## Overview

This chapter includes the following key issues:

- What are some approaches to teaching reading?
- What is the nature of second language reading?
  - Types of knowledge.
  - Reading processes.
- What reading skills and strategies are important?
  - Reading skills.
  - Reading strategies.
- How should reading be taught?
  - Determining goals.
  - Choosing materials.
  - Conducting a reading lesson.
  - Beyond the structured lesson.
- How can reading be assessed?

## 14.1 Introduction

Many second language learners need good reading skills in English, and reading has always been an important focus of English language teaching programmes. Despite advances that have been made in our understanding of the nature of second language reading, many students still read in English with difficulty – and may also experience difficulty in reading in their mother tongue – due to an inadequate reading curriculum and/or inadequate instruction in state schools. In a recent study of reading in 57 countries which assessed students on a five-point scale (5 = fluent reading ability), over 50% of students in Indonesia performed at level 1 (the lowest level) or lower, indicating that they had serious difficulties in using reading as a means of extending knowledge (Rohim, 2009). Results were similar for students from many other countries. Students with poor reading skills in their first language are likely to have similar difficulties when it comes to reading in a second language.

Current approaches to the teaching of second language reading are very different from earlier approaches. In the past, reading was usually taught by providing texts that students read (usually contrived texts written to word lists), followed by comprehension questions. There was little difference in approach between teaching reading and testing reading. And advanced reading served as a form of cultural enrichment, rather than offering any real-world goals. Today, the role English plays in the information and communication age has prompted a rethinking of approaches to the teaching of reading. Many learners need to develop effective analytical processing skills, problem-solving ability and critical thinking skills through reading, and need to develop technical reading skills, rather than those used for literary reading. They need to access, analyze, authenticate and apply information acquired from different sources and turn it into useful personal knowledge. And much of their reading may not be based on printed sources, but on online reading. In addition, the growing use of English as a medium to teach content subjects in schools, as well as the role of English as an international language, highlight the need for effective approaches to second language reading instruction.



How well do you read in another language? What difficulties do you encounter when you read something in another language?

### Why we read

Literacy skills play a vital role in people's everyday lives at home, at work, at school and in their communities. In a single day, an adult may use reading for many different purposes. For example:

Reasons for reading	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For everyday activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading a bus timetable.</li> <li>Reading instructions on a food package.</li> <li>Reading a sign in an elevator.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For learning about things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Going online to get information about someone.</li> <li>Getting a recipe off the internet.</li> <li>Reading about a travel destination.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For life purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading hobby magazines.</li> <li>Studying a driving manual before taking a driving test.</li> <li>Reading an advice column in a magazine.</li> <li>Reading the newspaper to find out about tickets to a concert.</li> <li>Reading membership requirements of a gym.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For leisure and pleasure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading a romance novel.</li> <li>Reading a religious text.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For study purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading an article.</li> <li>Reading a textbook.</li> <li>Searching the internet.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For work purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading a report.</li> <li>Reading emails.</li> <li>Reading instructions.</li> </ul>



**Monitor your own reading for one day. What were your reasons for reading? What kinds of things did you read?**

Second language learners may need reading skills in English for similar purposes, i.e. to enable them to participate in activities related to work, the community, daily life and, particularly, education. Today's learners are also 'multi-literate' (Jones and Hafner, 2012). Kajder (2007) explores this term:

Twenty-first century literacy has expanded beyond learning to read a print text format and moved to encompass multiple literacies in multiple modes. These multimodal practices are 'blurring the distinction between writer and reader, producer and consumer, and require a complex range of skills, knowledge and understanding' (Carrington and Marsh, 2005) ... When we 'multimediate', we use media, produce media and engage in literate practices as a way of engaging in the world (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). New digital tools require, and make possible, new ways of constructing and communicating meaning, leading multiple forms of media (not just print text) to have authority for representation.

## Academic reading skills

The ability to read effectively for academic purposes is crucial for many readers, particularly for the millions of international students enrolled worldwide in colleges and universities where English is the medium of instruction. Reading is a vital component of university study, and as Moore, Morton and Price observe (2007: 3):

Nowadays, many recognize that it is the intelligent engagement with one's sources that more than anything else defines the quality of being academically literate.... In the domain of language testing, the manifest importance of reading in university study is reflected in the prominence given to this skill area in the various language tests used by universities for selection of students. Thus, in all the varieties of format in the more widely-used language tests over the last 30 years (ELTS, IELTS, TOEFL), one single common element has been the use of a dedicated reading component.

Academic reading focuses on the role of texts as vehicles of information and depends upon both good linguistic knowledge and reading skills. These include:

- Knowledge of both academic and technical vocabulary specific to the reader's fields of study.
- Familiarity with the organizational structure of academic texts.
- Ability to use abstracts, headings, subheadings and layout to guide comprehension.
- Ability to select relevant information and retain for later use.
- Ability to analyze and synthesize information.
- Ability to apply reading skills learned in the classroom to out-of-class reading.

The ability to read critically is also particularly important for students who need reading skills for academic purposes. Critical reading involves reacting to what one reads, relating the content of reading materials and evaluating this content against personal standards and beliefs. This means going beyond what is given in the text and recognizing underlying ideologies, as well as critically evaluating the relevance and value of what is read. Reading in the digital age also requires new kinds of academic reading skills. Jones and Hafner (2012: 1) suggest these include:

- The ability to quickly search through and evaluate great amounts of information.
- The ability to create coherent reading pathways through complex collections of linked texts.

- The ability to quickly make connections between widely disparate ideas and domains of experience.
- The ability to read multimodal documents that combine words, graphics, video and audio.

The purpose for reading also affects the way a person reads. When reading a newspaper, the reader usually reads the front page first, skimming for headlines and then deciding what to read further. Some sections of the paper might be read quite closely, while others may be skimmed for specific information. In reading for academic or professional purposes, the reader may need to synthesize information from different sources, remembering points of similarity and difference and finding a way to organize the information for later use. At other times, readers may read to be entertained (Grabe and Stoller, 2002).

A teacher describes how he uses the internet as a teaching resource:

### Reading and the internet

My students do most of their reading on the internet, and I think it is important to help develop their confidence in reading English online. To give lower-level students practice in skimming and scanning for required sites on the internet, we do some search activities together in class. Using their smartphones or laptops, I ask them to search for a topic they may be interested in, e.g. a famous pop singer, such as Lady Gaga, and then, using the same search engine, e.g. Google, we type in the pop singer's name and, concentrating on the first two pages of search results, and, without accessing any of the sites listed, we try to decide which sites would be best for a) current news about her, b) images of her, c) her biography, d) her videos, etc., and, having made some guesses, the chosen sites are opened, and the students confirm if their guesses were correct.

*Dino Mahoney, teacher, teacher educator and writer, London, UK*

## 14.2 Approaches to teaching reading

The teaching of reading has been addressed in different ways in language teaching. We saw in Chapter 3 that contemporary approaches to teaching English as a second language have their origins in the direct method – a method that gave priority to spoken, rather than written, language. After the 1920s, difficulties in implementing the direct method to teach the spoken language led to a scaling back of the goals of language teaching to something that was more attainable: reading comprehension – a skill that could be more readily taught in large classes by teachers who did not necessarily speak English fluently. This resulted in a reading approach that was widely adopted in language teaching in Africa, India and other areas of British ESL/ELT influence, prior to the Second World War, and which made use of graded reading materials, written with a limited, level-appropriate range of vocabulary. Similarly in the United States, during this time, language teaching was also based on this reading method. Stern (1983: 461) comments:

The course of study that was developed over a period of decades provided graded reading materials and a systematic approach to learning to read. The spoken language was not entirely neglected, but it was the reading objective that received the main emphasis ... Above all, vocabulary control in reading texts was regarded as of prime importance, and so was the distinction between intensive reading for detailed study and extensive rapid reading of graded 'readers' for general comprehension.

Following the Second World War, as we saw in Chapter 3, the need for a focus on spoken language assumed priority in language teaching, and the audiolingual method was developed for this purpose. In the audiolingual method, reading was viewed as the ability to read sentence patterns that had first been established orally, as in this quote from Rivers (1968: 219):

The bulk of the class time will still be devoted to aural–oral practice. The early period, with a script, will be used for training in reading directly in the foreign language, without translation. The printed script will represent material which has been learned orally, and the symbols will be continually associated with the oral version.

The gradual decline of the audiolingual method, from the 1960s onward, was followed by a reassessment of the goals of language teaching. At the same time, the emergence of the discipline of applied linguistics, as well as developments in linguistics, psychology, second language acquisition, education and other disciplines, offered different accounts of the nature of reading in a second language. Second language reading research began to conceptualize reading from a number of new perspectives: as a component of a person's literacy practices, as knowledge of the nature of texts and their functions and organization, and as the use of cognitively driven processes that readers bring to texts. Second language reading was seen to involve far more than the mastery of reading skills. Cognitive views of reading are currently prominent in L2 reading theory, as pointed out by Grabe, reflecting a process that moves from controlled to automatic processing (see Chapter 2) (2009: 17):

Identifying such a cognitive learning theory as grounding for a description of reading and reading development highlights the incremental nature of skill-learning, the need for extended practice, the importance of time on task, the integration of sub-skills and sub-routines as proceduralization, the introduction of new information as just the beginning phase of learning and the central role of automaticity for fluent and skilled reading ability.

It is these newer perspectives on reading that are reflected in current approaches to the teaching of second language reading.

## 14.3 The nature of second language reading

### Types of knowledge

It is easy to say what reading is – the process of making meaning from a text – but it is not so easy to describe what comprehension of a text entails and how comprehension

is achieved. Several different types of knowledge – grammatical knowledge, vocabulary knowledge and prior knowledge – are involved in understanding a text.

## *Grammatical knowledge*

A reader must have a good knowledge of syntax, since this forms the basis of sentence organization within texts. Successful readers make use of syntactic knowledge to determine the overall meaning of sentences. The syntactic complexity of a sentence will influence how easy it is to read, and the kinds of syntax the reader encounters will depend on the type of texts they read. Aebbersold and Field (1997: 12) give the following examples of sentences from different kinds of texts:

- 1 He said the concentrated steams, releasing not only moisture, but latent heat in the higher latitudes, may turn out to be the main source of the hurricanes.
- 2 Thus, what students are taught about any subject necessarily values certain aspects of that subject over others.
- 3 I want my own copy – next time we go to Borders.
- 4 On the broad, level land floor for the gang plows bit deep and left the black earth shining like metal where the shares had cut.

The sentences from the newspaper [1], the academic textbook [2] and the short story [4] are longer than those from the personal note [3]. The newspaper and academic sentences are also more complex grammatically.

Sentences are longer in written texts than in spoken language, and often contain embedded and subordinated clauses, since such texts can be processed visually, unlike spoken texts which must be produced and processed in real time and where, consequently, sentences are shorter and contain mainly coordinated clauses. Written texts are planned and reflect the process of planning, such as editing, attention to word choice and linguistic accuracy.



Re-read the first sentence in the paragraph above. How do you think this information would be expressed in a spoken text?

Linguistic differences between the students' first language and English may also affect reading. Grabe and Stoller (2002), for example, have pointed out that ESL/ELT students from places where their first language is a Romance language (such as Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese) tend to focus greater amounts of attention on 'the ends of the words, because there is more grammatical information there than in English', while readers whose first language is Chinese, Japanese and Korean will make greater use of visual processing than readers of English, because of the different orthographic conventions employed in their first language writing system.



## Vocabulary knowledge

Good readers have a large vocabulary and continue to add to their vocabulary throughout their lives, mainly through reading. It is obviously not possible to teach students all of the words that they might encounter in their reading. Although a vocabulary of 3,000 words may be sufficient for reading materials of average difficulty, as we saw in Chapter 10, far more words are needed to read more difficult texts, such as academic books and articles. Researchers suggest that between 6,000 and 10,000 words are needed to give an L2 reader 'a reasonable chance at understanding an academic text, though not reading the text fluently' (Grabe, 2009: 271). Readers with smaller vocabularies will require a lot more instructional support. If there are too many unknown words in a text, comprehension may be virtually impossible. However, if the reader is making some sense of a text and encounters an unknown word, he or she can either ignore it, assuming that the meaning may become clearer later on, or try to guess its meaning from context (Laufer and Yano, 2001). The ability to guess word meanings from context is also dependent upon vocabulary knowledge, since a large vocabulary is needed to enable the reader to make suitable guesses (Paribakht, 2005). Online dictionaries can help learners in their reading, especially those that allow words to be clicked for an immediate definition or translation so that reading is not too much interrupted.



**How often do you come across an unknown word when you read? Do you sometimes use an online dictionary when you do so?**

Readers with limited language proficiency and unfamiliarity with effective reading strategies may rely too heavily on vocabulary knowledge. L2 readers often adopt a surface-level approach to reading; that is, they read at the word level, rather than with a focus on main ideas and general comprehension – in other words, they are 'word-bound' (Carrell, 1988). They fail to connect the immediate content of reading with their overall reading goal and become readily distracted by failure to understand meanings at the word level. This may result in overuse of underlining and of the dictionary.

A teacher comments on making the process of reading more enjoyable for students:



### Teachers are readers, too

If we expect our students to develop a love of reading in English, we have to practise what we preach. We need to show that we are committed to improving our own English through reading and that reading in English can be enjoyable, too. I try to set myself a target of reading something in English every day and to read one book of any kind a month. For teachers, it's important to have a nice environment in the school where we can read and where we can put together a professional library and a collection of books that anyone can borrow to read. In one of the schools where I teach, some of



us have formed a reading club where we choose books to read and meet to share our reactions to them. Once we develop a commitment and enthusiasm for reading, we can begin to pass this on to our students.

*José Lema, teacher and teacher educator, Quito, Ecuador*

## Prior knowledge

Readers bring many different kinds of prior knowledge to reading, including knowledge about the topic of a text and the events featured in them. They recognize familiar text types (e.g. expository texts, information texts, narrative texts). They also make use of their understanding of how such texts are usually organized, the kinds of information they contain and the contexts in which they typically appear. In processing texts, readers utilize different kinds of schema which serve to guide the reader through the processing of information related to a topic. If the reader cannot activate a schema for a text, it may be impossible to understand (see Chapters 2 and 12). Readers also access sociocultural knowledge when they read. For instance, a text about Australian social customs may assume that the reader is familiar with practices associated with greetings, leisure activities, weddings, meals, gift-giving, dress and other references in the text. Without such prior knowledge, comprehension may be only partial.



The following sentences activate different types of schema and lead the reader to expect a particular type of text. What type of text do you expect to read?

- 1 Let me tell you what happened.
- 2 First you will need to buy some fresh prawns and two small onions.
- 3 This is a book that will appeal to all parents with young children.
- 4 Have you always wanted to be able to remember people's names?
- 5 I found David Green's article on teenagers in the November issue very interesting.

## The reading process

### *Bottom-up and top-down processing*

Fluent reading is said to involve an interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing (see Chapter 12). Bottom-up processing suggests that when a reader processes a text they do so in a certain order, i.e. from words to phrases to sentences and so on, until the meaning of the text is arrived at. Top-down processing, in both listening and reading, suggests that the reader makes use of background knowledge together with conceptual knowledge and processing strategies, in order to arrive at understanding of texts. In reading, top-down processing is based on the view that the reader actively controls the comprehension process, directed by reader goals, expectations and strategic processing.

Interactive processing, on the other hand, combines both forms of processing (top-down and bottom-up) and suggests that they function together. Reading is seen as an active process, involving the reader in ongoing interaction with texts as they read. An interactive view of reading is based on the idea that successful reading is an act of creation. Meaning is created through the interaction between a reader and a text. The meaning of a text does not consist of a fixed, static form tied to the words on the page. It emerges anew each time the reader encounters a text (Carrell et al., 1988).

**?** In your experience, is reading generally taught with a focus on top-down or bottom-up approaches?

A teacher educator comments on how students at different levels use top-down and bottom-up processing:

### Interaction of top-down and bottom-up skills

Obviously, proficient users of a language use a carefully balanced combination of top-down and bottom-up processing. I've found that learners need explicit help to achieve this balance in a second or other language. At lower levels, the natural thing to do when reading is to look at every word and make sure you know what it means before moving on to the next one. Unfortunately, what happens is you either get to a word you have no idea about and get stuck, or you take so long to get to the end of the sentence you can't remember what the words at the beginning were.

At higher levels, the opposite occurs. The learners have become so good at skimming that that's all they do. They often need to slow down and do a bit more bottom-up processing to understand the details and the nuances of the text. Therefore, as teachers, we have to encourage learners to use both processes. More top-down at lower levels and more bottom-up at higher levels. It is important to be explicit. Demonstrate how the processes are different and why we use both. This can easily be included in reading lessons, as often as necessary, until the learners have got the idea.

*Peter Nicoll, teacher and teacher educator, Auckland, New Zealand*

## *Levels of comprehension*

As well as top-down and bottom-up approaches to reading, reading comprehension can also be described in terms of different levels of comprehension associated with reading, since comprehension can refer to understanding of details in a text, understanding of main ideas, understanding of implied meanings and so on as we see in the vignette above. A widely cited taxonomy of levels of understanding is known as Barrett's taxonomy (Hudson 2007: 85) and identifies five different levels of understanding. These are referred to as *literal comprehension* (concern with information stated explicitly in the

text), *reorganization* (analyzing, synthesizing and organizing information that has been stated explicitly), *inferential comprehension* (using information explicitly stated, along with one's own personal experience, as a basis for conjecture and hypothesis), *evaluation* (judgements and decisions concerning value and worth) and *appreciation* (psychological and aesthetic impact of the text on the reader). This taxonomy is useful because it reminds us that not all texts require the same level of understanding or are read in the same way. It also influences the design of reading instruction, since tasks that seek to teach or assess literal comprehension may be different from those that are used to teach or assess appreciation.



For each of the levels on Barrett's taxonomy, can you suggest examples of text types that would normally be read with that level of comprehension?

## Inferencing

This refers to arriving at a meaning which has not been explicitly stated in a text by making links between information in the text and our knowledge of the world. As a text is being read, the reader makes different kinds of inferences that enable him or her to process the text, and these are often incorporated in the reader's understanding of the text. Often, after reading a text, readers cannot distinguish between ideas that the text contained and inferences they made while reading it (Buck, 2001: 19). This can sometimes be a problem when reading comprehension is being tested – the readers' answers may be based on their guesses rather than information in the text itself.

## Fluency in reading

Grabe (2009: 14–15) argues that in order to understand the complexity of reading, it is necessary to focus on the processes made use of by fluent readers and to ask questions about what they do when they read, and how the processes they use work together to contribute to a general notion of reading. Fluent readers are able to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly, and generally with at least 70 per cent comprehension (Anderson, 2003). They are able to perform multiple tasks at the same time; for example, they can recognize words while also comprehending their meaning. This can be seen when we read the following text:

*The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid: Aoccdmrig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtaetr in what oerdr the ltteres in a word are. The olny iproamtnt tihng is that the frsit and last ltteer is in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses, and you can still raed it whotuit a pboerlm. This is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the word as a wlohe.*

We can understand the text without difficulty, because we understand what we *expect* to encounter. We are driven by the need to understand, so we read for meaning and do not need to consciously process the meaning of each and every word in the text.

## 14.4 Reading skills and strategies

The distinction between skills and strategies has generated a great deal of discussion in the literature on first and second language reading. They are generally understood to be related to each other, with 'skills' being the non-conscious habits that have been established through practice and repetition, whereas 'strategies' are deliberate and goal-directed responses to a reading task. Afflerback et al. (2008) suggest that strategies are 'what we turn to when we lack the skills to accomplish something and that even basic skills benefit from being taught as strategies initially because strategies are how we manage difficult tasks'. Strategy instruction is seen as a means to skilful performance (<http://borderland.northernattitude.org/2008/02/09/on-reading-skills-and-strategies>).

### Reading skills

Many ESL/ELT reading courses focus on the development of both general and specific reading skills. For example, most reading coursebooks will include activities devoted to skimming, scanning, reading for main ideas and reading and making inferences – skills which are involved in many different kinds of reading. Sometimes skills may be selected for a particular kind of reading, or which are important for reading particular kinds of texts. For example, the following are sometimes described as skills needed for 'reading to learn'.

- Reading to find facts and details.
- Skimming a text quickly for gist.
- Reading to obtain new ideas and information.
- Reading to connect information from different sources.
- Reading as a preparation for writing, or discussing a topic.
- Responding critically to things one reads.
- Reading for main ideas.

A more detailed list is contained in Munby (1978) and includes the following:

- Recognizing the script of a language.
- Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items.
- Understanding explicitly stated information.
- Understanding information when not explicitly stated.
- Understanding conceptual meaning.
- Understanding the communicative value of sentences.
- Understanding relations within the sentence.
- Understanding relations between parts of a text, through grammatical cohesion devices.

- Interpreting a text by going outside it.
- Recognizing indicators in discourse.
- Identifying the main point or important information in discourse.
- Distinguishing the main ideas from supporting details.
- Extracting salient details to summarize a text.
- Extracting relevant points from a text selectively.
- Skimming.
- Scanning to locate specifically required information.
- Transcoding information to diagrammatic display.

The Barrett taxonomy, referred to earlier, is yet another breakdown of reading skills – one which links skills to different kinds of comprehension. ‘Skills’, as defined by Barrett, are really a sampling of different behaviours that characterize the different kinds of reading processes discussed earlier in this chapter. Reading specialists are sceptical of the validity of the concept of skills, since there is no consensus as to the nature of skills, and there are many different lists of skills to choose from. Perhaps this reflects the fact that, unlike productive skills, receptive skills are not directly observable. However, many teachers and materials’ developers find them a convenient pedagogic device for the design of reading materials and activities, and they continue to provide a strand of many reading courses.

## Reading strategies

Readers use different strategies depending on the kind of text they are reading, their familiarity with the topic of the text, the difficulty level of the text, their purpose in reading it and so on. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of learner strategies.) They think about the process of reading and monitor their reading, based on what and why they are reading. A strategic reader adjusts his or her approach to a text by considering questions such as the following:

- What is my purpose in reading this text? Am I reading it for pleasure? Am I reading it to keep up to date on current events? Will I need this information later (e.g. for a test)?
- What kind of text is this? Is it an advertisement, a report, a news article or some other kind of text?
- What is the writer’s purpose? Is it to persuade, to entertain or to inform the reader?
- What kind of information do I expect to find in the text?
- What do I already know about texts of this kind? How are they usually organized?
- How should I read this text? Should I read it to find specific information, or should I read it for main ideas? Should I read it again carefully to focus on the details?

- What linguistic difficulties does the text pose? How can I deal with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentences and lengthy sentences and paragraphs?
- What is my opinion about the content of the text?

Appropriate reading strategies are selected in response to questions like these. They may prompt the reader to make predictions about the content and organization of a text based on background knowledge of the topic, as well as familiarity with the text type. They may help the reader to decide the rate at which to read the text – a quick skim for main ideas, quickly to scan for specific information, a slower, closer reading for more detailed comprehension or a rapid reading to build fluency. Other reading strategies help the reader make sense of the relationship between ideas, such as cause and effect, comparison–contrast and so on. In addition, the strategy of reading a text critically – reacting to it and formulating opinions about the content – is a crucial part of being a successful reader. (See Grabe and Stoller 2002).

Whereas fluent readers are familiar with a range of reading strategies and adjust their use of strategies based on their reading purposes, poor readers make use of fewer strategies and may not use strategies appropriately. They may adopt a word-by-word approach to reading, assuming that every word in a text is equally important and read all texts in the same way. Grabe and Stoller (2002: 210) suggest that teachers can make a wall poster listing reading strategies, which can serve as a reference point during reading activities.



**Are there any strategies you can think of which are specific to reading texts online?**

In order to help learners use effective reading strategies, the teacher may model the strategy directly. This involves the teacher thinking aloud as he or she reads a text (Duffy, 2002), showing students how particular aspects of the text were approached and how difficulties encountered were resolved. Through talking about the strategy he or she uses as the text is read, the teacher demonstrates the kind of thinking and decision-making that can be used while reading. This applies both to print and online texts, which may require additional strategies. Rohim (2009: 7) gives the following example of how a think-aloud procedure is used:

- 1 The teacher selects a passage to read aloud that poses comprehension problems for readers, for example, complex or difficult concepts, contradictions, ambiguities or unknown words. The teacher is careful the passage includes specific sections where comprehension breaks down, in order to model with students ways to deal with each.
- 2 The teacher reads the passage aloud and thinks out loud about the problems encountered, reflecting how he or she monitors understanding of the text and makes decisions to remedy comprehension problems. The students observe the teacher's modelling silently, noting the monitoring of comprehension. The teacher should include the following considerations during think-aloud:

- *Make predictions (develop hypotheses):* For example, 'From the title, I predict that this section will tell how fishermen used to catch whales ... In this next part, I think we'll find out why the man flew into the hurricane ... I think this is a description of a computer game.'
  - *Describe the pictures imagined from the information given:* For example, 'As I read, I see this scene in my mind: The car is on a dark, probably narrow, road; there are no other cars around ...'
  - *Make analogies (linking prior knowledge to new information in the text):* For example, 'This is like a time we had a flat tire while driving to Boston. We were worried and had to walk three miles for help ...'
  - *Verbalize confusing points (monitoring ongoing comprehension):* For example, 'This just doesn't make sense ... This is different from what I had expected.'
  - *Demonstrate 'fix-up' strategies (correcting lagging comprehension):* For example, 'That is not clear; I'd better reread ... Maybe I'll read ahead to see if it gets clearer ... I'd better change my picture of the story ... This is a new word to me, and it seems crucial to the meaning of the essay; I'd better try to figure out what it means here ...'
- 3 The teacher leads a debriefing discussion in which students summarize what the teacher did and why. They focus on the choices made by the teacher and the reasons and outcomes of those choices.
  - 4 The teacher helps the students generate a list of steps, or strategies, readers may use to monitor comprehension and repair it. The class adds to this list throughout the year, as new strategies emerge.
  - 5 The teacher structures a small-group or paired activity in which students take turns practising think-aloud techniques with difficult reading materials.
  - 6 The teacher uses the think-aloud technique frequently with various materials to reinforce during-reading strategies, encouraging students to use it, when reading independently, to enhance their own comprehension.

A teacher comments on helping students to choose the most appropriate reading strategy for the text and their reading purposes:

### Helping learners to choose the best reading strategy

With my college reading class, I use the SRA kit [a set of cards with texts graded in difficulty] to practise strategies. Although these materials were not designed for ESL students, they work well with my students and prepare them to cope with authentic texts. Students choose a card that contains a text of two to three pages, followed by detailed comprehension questions. Students are given a choice of four strategies to use in reading the passage:



*Strategy A:* Read the text, read the comprehension questions, and then go back and skim for answers. This is the most detailed way of reading the text.

*Strategy B:* Read the questions, read the text carefully to find the answers, and then go back and check the answers against the questions.

*Strategy C:* Skim the text, read the questions, and then scan for the answer.

*Strategy D:* Read the questions, and then skim for the answers. This is the fastest strategy.

The students go to the reading kit and select a card to work with. I go round first and ask what texts they have chosen and which strategy they will use. Generally, the students will choose a slower strategy if they are unfamiliar with the topic. I am trying to sensitize them to the fact that they should choose strategies appropriate to the kind of material they are reading and their reason for reading it.

*José Lema, teacher and teacher educator, Quito, Ecuador*

## 14.5 Teaching reading

### Determining goals

Reading courses are of many different kinds, depending on whether reading is taught as a separate skill or linked to other skills, such as writing; whether the focus is on general reading improvement or reading for specific purposes, such as academic reading or business English; or whether the course is aimed to prepare students for the reading component of a test, such as IELTS or TOEFL. In order to develop goals for a reading course, it is necessary to start with needs analysis, in order to determine the kinds of texts students need to read, the reading demands of the texts they will read (i.e. in terms of vocabulary, text length, text features, topic, etc.) and the students' current level of reading ability. No matter the type of reading course, it will generally seek to expand students' knowledge of vocabulary, text structure and organization, to develop students' understanding and use of strategies, to provide large amounts of reading practice and to increase learners' motivation to read by providing opportunities for success in reading, as well as feedback and support for learners. Course planning is examined in depth in Chapter 17.

### Choosing materials

#### *Authentic or adapted materials*

An issue that often arises in a reading course is the extent to which students should read authentic or composed texts. Both published materials and teacher-designed materials are often used in reading courses. Published materials may be composed of specially written texts, authentic texts containing little adaptation or texts that have been adapted

to remove difficult vocabulary, syntax and other features. Some reading specialists caution against the use of specially written texts in reading courses, arguing that specially written texts do not expose learners to examples of authentic language usage. In addition, they feel these texts oversimplify the lexical, grammatical and discoursal structure, and so do not prepare students for real-world reading. Because such texts are often very short, they can also encourage a bottom-up approach to reading. Authentic texts, on the other hand, are said to be intrinsically more motivating than created texts because they often relate more closely to learners' needs, and they can support a more creative approach to teaching. For teachers who wish to assess the difficulty of authentic texts, the free Lextutor concordancer ([www.lex tutor.ca/concordancers/text\\_concord/](http://www.lex tutor.ca/concordancers/text_concord/)) lets teachers and their learners paste a text into a webpage which will show them the frequency of each of the words in the text, with the most frequent ones shown first. This can be useful in order to get an idea of the difficulty of the text. Another way to do this is to look at a text's Flesch-Kincaid grade score or the Flesch readability score ([www.standards-schmandards.com/exhibits/rix/](http://www.standards-schmandards.com/exhibits/rix/)). Both tests look at average sentence and word length to estimate the relative difficulty of a text.

However, it can also be argued that what is important is not so much the authenticity of the text, but the authenticity of the processes the students are engaged in when they read the text (Thornbury, 2005c: 110). A well-written text for classroom use can provide the same opportunities for reading development as an authentic text if it reflects the same features as authentic texts.

The difficulty level of using authentic texts can also be addressed in other ways. For example:

- By choosing shorter texts.
- By choosing texts that include visual support (e.g. in the form of pictures or diagrams).
- By using simpler tasks, such as those that require scanning or identifying meanings stated explicitly in the text (e.g. Levels 1 and 2 on Barrett's taxonomy referred to above).



**What kinds of authentic texts could be used with your students? What advantages and difficulties might the use of these texts involve?**

A teacher explains how he helps students make the transition between coursebook reading and out-of-class reading in an EAP course:



### **Using authentic texts in an EAP course**

I teach a reading class that seeks to help first-year university students deal with reading the books and articles they have to read in their academic courses. There are two strands to the course. One focuses on developing reading skills and strategies. This makes use of a textbook that practises a variety of reading skills and strategies. The texts in the book are fairly short and are mainly adapted from real-world texts. The other

strand of the course is built around the texts students bring to class from things they are reading in their content classes. These are all authentic texts. I assign reading tasks (both individual and group tasks) to be used with these texts, which require students to apply the skills and strategies they have practised. Gradually, throughout the duration of the course, we make greater use of the texts students bring to class.

*Dino Mahoney, teacher, teacher educator and writer, London, UK*

Another way of addressing the difficulty level of authentic texts is through the use of graded readers. These are reading series graded across different levels, containing texts that have been controlled for difficulty, in terms of vocabulary, sentence length, grammar and discourse features. The texts may be simplified versions of novels, adapted from other sources, or be specially written texts, including original fiction. Graded readers help students develop fluency and confidence in reading and often form a component of an extensive reading programme (see below).

## Conducting a reading lesson

Like listening lessons, reading lessons often focus on three stages of the reading process: *pre-reading* (planning to read), *while-reading* (understanding and monitoring) and *post-reading* (evaluation).

### Pre-reading

Pre-reading activities provide background knowledge, activate schemas and help give a purpose for reading. For example, there may be an initial questionnaire or survey, followed by a reading, in which students compare their responses on the survey to information in the text. There might be a quiz to find out how much students know about a topic they are going to read about, or students might predict the content of the passage from the title, paragraph headings, words or illustrations. They might also be asked to predict which aspects of a topic they think a passage will deal with, after which they read and compare.

A common pre-reading activity involves pre-teaching key vocabulary from a text, in order to reduce the difficulty level of the text so that readers can apply reading skills and strategies while reading. Crandall (1995) suggests the following kinds of pre-reading activities:

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion questions.</li> <li>• Pre-writing activities:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainstorming.</li> <li>• Semantic mapping.</li> <li>• Free writing.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to relate the reading to a student's prior experience, activating and expanding the student's content and formal schema, building vocabulary and helping to identify cultural influences that may affect reading comprehension or interpretation.</li> </ul>

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prediction activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw attention to the organization of the text and to identification of potential themes and directions the author may take.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skimming activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide students with a general idea of the text themes and the organization and development of ideas.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions and other activities that focus on graphic cues:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Titles.</li> <li>Chapter headings.</li> <li>Indentations and white space.</li> <li>Any visuals and other text displays.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight the organization and relative importance of various themes in the text.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scanning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight key (including technical) vocabulary, as well as names, dates, places and other important facts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus students' attention during reading, as well as motivate them to do the reading.</li> </ul>



**What kind of pre-reading activities could be used with the following texts?**

- **A recipe.**
- **A letter to the editor about parking problems in a city.**
- **An advice column in a magazine about losing weight.**

A teacher comments on the value of pre-reading activities:



## **Importance of pre-reading activities**

For my students, reading in English is key to improving their language awareness (vocabulary and syntax), as well as providing information that can expand their world knowledge and provide a change in pace from other activities. Although my reading lessons usually follow the format of pre-reading session, while-reading [session] and post-reading and feedback session, the pre-reading phase is likely to be the most important step for my students. It helps trigger students' motivation [and] helps them to prepare for the kinds of texts they are going to read [and] to choose appropriate reading strategies, as well as familiarize themselves with some key vocabulary in a

text. I often use pictures [and] vocabulary cards, as well as some key sentences from the text, to prepare students for what they will read and to trigger their prior knowledge. The choice of text is very important since the right kind of text can motivate students to read, so it's crucial to ask students what kinds of things they want to read about. The reading material might sometimes be very simple, such as songs, anecdotes, short stories or selections from newspapers and magazines.

*Anuwat Kaewma, teacher and teacher educator, Sakon Nakhon province, Thailand*

## While-reading

While-reading activities encourage readers to react to what they read while reading. They may require readers to revise their understanding and adjust their reading as they read, based on difficulties they encounter. Or they may prompt the reader to keep the overall purpose of reading in mind. Contemporary reading materials often contain while-reading tasks that may occur alongside the text to guide the reader through the text and through the reading process. The type of while-reading activity will depend upon the type of text. For example, if the text is a narrative, students might number the sequence of events in the narrative on a list or chart. If the text presents information non-sequentially, however, as in an encyclopedia or information-based text, students may complete an information-transfer task, such as completing information in a grid or chart. Thornbury (2005c: 119) points out an important feature of tasks of this kind:

It's important to note that grid-filling, or sequencing tasks, are not intended as a test of the reader's comprehension, so much as a framework to help them organize their developing understanding of a text. In this sense, such tasks are not so much *comprehension* tasks as *comprehending* tasks.

Questioning is another useful while-reading activity. It can involve the teacher posing questions as the students read the text, or, in print materials, the questions may occur alongside the text to guide the students' reading. Students may also pose questions as they read. Crandall (1995) gives the following examples of other while-reading activities:

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete graph.</li> <li>Venn diagram.</li> <li>Flow chart or table.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help understand the logical relations between ideas in the text, and highlight for the student what is important enough to be noted and remembered.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided or controlled writing.</li> <li>Discussion question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage students to react and reflect upon what they are reading at key stages in the process, and to note confusion or questions they hope to have answered at the end of the reading.</li> </ul>

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underlining.</li> <li>Highlighting.</li> <li>Note-taking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help students develop more effective study skills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocabulary-building activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help students find clues for meaning within the text.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paraphrasing and summarizing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage students to see how an idea is developed and a text is structured, to draw inferences and to effectively tie new ideas to prior topics.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timed activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage rapid reading, perhaps combined with questions that require skimming for general answers or scanning for key information.</li> </ul>

A variety of software is also available to support while-reading. Electronic 'talking books' are a good example and enable students to choose digitized pronunciation of individual words or to listen to the whole text. Text-to-speech software can read any text aloud, and encouraging learners to read along while listening can be helpful for them. In this way, learners can also improve their extensive listening skills, as listening forces them not to read word for word.

## Post-reading

Post-reading activities may focus on the text itself, i.e. its vocabulary, grammar or discourse organization, or elicit the student's reaction to the content of the text. They may also provide a review of the strategies the student has used in reading the text, and develop strategies for remembering what was read, if necessary. A speaking activity is the most common post-reading activity and is often a reaction to the specific content, or broad theme, of the text. Other suggestions summarized from Crandall (1995) are:

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocabulary activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help students to expand their vocabulary by applying affixes and roots, drawn from the key vocabulary in the reading, using charts and tables to illustrate the relationships between the words.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage critical analysis and evaluation of the reading.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete notes.</li> <li>Partial summaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help students to summarize the text.</li> </ul>

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloze activities.</li> <li>• Sentence strip activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop vocabulary, grammar and discourse knowledge.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to reflect on, synthesize or evaluate what they have read.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to apply what they have read to some task or activity.</li> </ul>

**?** Post-reading activities often serve to make links to other skills, such as writing and speaking. Can you suggest activities of this kind after students have read a text on changes in teenagers' fashions?

See Appendix 2 for a sample reading lesson provided by a teacher, and Appendix 3 for a sample reading lesson from a textbook.

A teacher educator demonstrates a reading activity that involves comparing two points of view:

### ●● Recognizing the writer's point of view

I think it is important for my students to be aware of the writer behind the text: what point of view is she or he expressing in the text? Is this point of view clearly stated or buried in the text? To help develop this awareness, I ask my higher-level students to read two film reviews about the same film, taken from different newspapers and journals. Film reviewers often use a five-star award system, giving five stars to a film they rate very positively and one star to a film they rate very negatively. I mask the star rating, and then ask the students to read the reviews and guess how many stars the film was awarded. After that, I reveal the actual number of stars awarded, and we then explore ways in which a negative or positive view was expressed in the texts.

*Dino Mahoney, teacher, teacher educator and writer, London, UK*

## Beyond the structured lesson

Reading courses, in addition to teaching skills and strategies, may wish to focus on developing fluency and/or enjoyment in reading, moving beyond the structured lesson of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. Two ways to encourage students to become fluent readers are through speed reading and extensive reading.



## Developing fluency

Fluency can be developed by giving students frequent opportunities to practise reading for general comprehension, using short passages of 100 to 200 words in length. Their rate of reading may be timed so that, over the duration of a course, they work to improve their reading speed. They may read the same passage several times during a practice period and should monitor their progress throughout the course. An important aspect of fluency in reading is the ability to read quickly – speed reading. Students who adopt a word-by-word surface approach to reading are slow readers and often cannot cope with the large amounts of reading they need to do in their school courses. Speed-reading techniques aim to help students process texts more rapidly, to achieve a greater level of understanding of what they read, to use more effective eye movements when reading and to use better ways of understanding words and meaning in texts. There are a number of websites that help students to measure their reading speed (e.g. [www.readingsoft.com/](http://www.readingsoft.com/)).

## Extensive reading

The reading activities described above generally involve reading of shorter texts, accompanied by reading tasks which are completed during a single class period, usually under teacher supervision (Nuttall, 1996). Much of the emphasis is on developing reading skills and strategies, as well as in processing different text types for different reading purposes. This approach to reading is often referred to as *intensive reading*. This can be compared to *extensive reading*, which refers to reading in quantity and for pleasure, and is usually done outside of class time, using graded readers or other materials. Extensive reading is intended to improve students' overall reading performance (especially that of beginning students) by enhancing incidental language learning in such areas as spelling, vocabulary, grammar and text structure. When extensive reading is used to build fluency, most of the words in the text the students are reading should be known to them. When the purpose of extensive reading is for language development, more difficult texts can be used. However, the main purpose of extensive reading is to encourage students to develop an interest and a habit in reading on their own so that they can move from learning to read to reading to learn.

Day and Bamford (2004: 2–3) list the following characteristics of a successful extensive reading programme:

- Students read large amounts of printed material.
- Students read a variety of materials in terms of topic and genre.
- The material students read is within their level of comprehension.
- Students choose what they want to read.
- Reading is its own reward.
- Students read for pleasure, information and general understanding.
- Students read their selection at a faster rate.

- Reading is individual (students read on their own). Teachers read with their students, thus serving as role models of good readers.
- Teachers guide and keep track of student progress.

Hedge (2000: 202) suggests that an extensive-reading component to a reading course could include:

- Reading large quantities of materials, whether short stories and novels, newspaper and magazine articles, or professional reading.
- Reading consistently, over time, on a frequent and regular basis.
- Reading longer texts (more than a few paragraphs in length) of the types listed in the first point above.
- Reading for general meaning, primarily for pleasure, curiosity or professional interest.
- Reading longer texts during class time, but also engaging in individual, independent reading at home, ideally of self-selected material.

Extensive reading often depends upon building up a class library of books or readers of different levels, setting students' targets for reading and having students keep a reading journal in which they set reading goals, write book reports and assess their own reading development. However, students can also choose their own texts for extensive-reading practice, and choice of reading materials can play an important role in maintaining motivation. Students can choose materials they wish to read (e.g. from the internet), share their reading interests and experiences in groups and read things that are related to their out-of-class interests and needs. Many online reading materials are of interest to students, and although posts on social-networking sites are usually short and may not offer a great deal of reading practice, teachers can recommend authors known for the quality of their writing, either on their own blogs or their social networking pages.



What kinds of extensive reading to do you think your students do?

An extensive-reading lesson plan can be found in Appendix 1.

## *Developing independent readers*

One of the goals of a reading course is to enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning. This means they need to be able to monitor their own progress and identify ways of setting personal goals for reading improvement. To do so, they need to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as readers and to know how to use reference works designed to assist them in independent learning (e.g. dictionaries or computer-based programs that can be used to improve reading speed). One way to achieve these goals is through the use of a reading response journal. Rohim (2009: 11) comments:

Response journals are places where students reflect on their readings independently, with the teacher or with other students. Journals allow students to take control of their own learning. In journals, students respond to what they have experienced and learned, how it relates to them personally, how they learned it, how they used it, what still needs to be learned and clarified, as well as other things. Once students are aware of their own learning, they become able to select, implement and evaluate strategies that are effective for them. Reading journals, in particular, enable students to see what sorts of responses they make (that is, to inspect the stances from which they respond), to reflect on their own reading and on literature, and to set goals for their own reading growth.

In journals, students can address questions such as these:

- 1** What do I notice about my reading?
- 2** Is this reading easy for me? Why?
- 3** Is this reading hard for me? Why?
- 4** Next time I read, I will try to ...
- 5** Something I do better now than before is ...
- 6** A reading strategy I used is ...
- 7** I used this reading strategy because ...
- 8** A reading problem I have is ...
- 9** What do I want to be able to do as a reader?

## **14.6** Assessing reading

Reading assessment serves a number of purposes. It may be part of a standardized test of a learner's overall reading proficiency; it may be an assessment of classroom learning; it may be designed to improve learning and teaching; and it may also be used to assess the effectiveness of teaching materials or a reading programme (curricular effectiveness) (Grabe, 2009). As with other kinds of tests, validity is an important consideration in designing reading tests (see Chapter 20). Does the test really measure what it is supposed to measure? Does the correct answer on a test mean that the student is using the reading skill the teacher wanted to measure?

Tests of reading proficiency may assess a number of different aspects of reading, such as comprehension of main ideas, recall of relevant details, inferencing skills, vocabulary knowledge, awareness of text structure and organization, fluency and reading speed and critical reading skills. In assessing reading, the goal is to find out in what ways students' reading has improved as a result of reading instruction. Typical item-types in tests of this kind include:

- *Multiple choice*: Students choose one answer from among a range of alternatives.
- *True-false questions*: Students indicate if a statement is true or false, based on information in the passage.
- *Short answers*: Students answer questions for which there is only one possible short answer that will provide information about the passage. This type of item can be used to test students' ability to make inferences. For example, students might read a passage and then provide short answers to questions about content that is either stated or must be inferred.
- *Fill-in tasks*: Students are given statements and choose a suitable word, from among those provided, to fill in a missing word in the statement.
- *Labelling*: Students read a text and label or complete a diagram.
- *Cloze tasks*: Students complete missing words in a passage.

Test items, such as those above, are commonly used to measure comprehension of texts, but may also be used to assess students' abilities to choose suitable strategies when they read. For example, students might be given a text to read, with the purpose for reading specified. They might then check, from a list, the strategy they would use to read the text.

Reading tests designed to assess classroom learning may seek to answer questions such as the following:

- Has the students' reading speed increased?
- Can they now better identify main ideas in a reading passage?
- Have they moved beyond a surface-level approach to reading?
- Can they read and make inferences?
- Can they read a wider range of text types?
- Can they read more difficult texts?
- How do they now cope with difficult vocabulary?
- Are they now more strategic readers?

Similar item types to those used in proficiency tests may also be used in more informal forms of assessment, such as observations, self-reporting measures, response journals, progress charts and portfolios.

When the role of assessment is not to measure progress, but to improve teaching and learning (see Chapters 17 and 20), the goal is to help students deal with reading difficulties, to develop effective learning strategies, to develop self-directed learning and to improve motivation. Grabe (2009: 364) summarizes this as follows:

In its simplest form, the teacher gathers feedback on student performance (e.g. on reading-related activities) on a continual basis and engages students in improving their learning, based

on teacher responses. Teachers learn to respond to student signals of non-comprehension through teacher observations, outcomes of students' weak performance or specific feedback mechanisms that students use.

Finally, assessment of teaching materials and the curriculum involves an analysis of both, to determine if the content and teaching methods are in alignment with the programme's goals. This may be accomplished by collecting feedback from students and teachers on the effectiveness of the materials and reviewing students' performance in tests and other forms of assessment (see Chapter 20).

## 14.7 Conclusion

Second language reading research has considerably enriched our understanding of second language reading processes, clarifying such areas as the nature of bottom-up and top-down processing, the role of prior knowledge and schemas in comprehension and the role of strategies in developing fluency in reading. It is now accepted that the meaning the reader takes from the text is based on many different kinds of knowledge and skills. These include the reader's knowledge of the topic of the text, familiarity with the information given in the text, the ability to process the language of the text, familiarity with the type of text and the context in which the text occurs. The ease with which a person reads will also reflect his or her language proficiency, how he or she approaches the text and the purposes the reader has in reading.

This chapter has demonstrated that an approach to the teaching of second language reading needs to be firmly grounded in an adequate understanding of the nature of reading and the processes fluent readers makes use of, an awareness of the difficulties second language readers face and sound principles for the design of reading courses and materials. The choice of reading materials, modelling of reading strategies, development of fluency in reading and creating motivation to read, through both intensive and extensive reading, are all key factors in an effective reading programme for second language learners.

## Discussion questions

- 1 Interview one or more learners. What kinds of reading in English do they do outside of class? How much of their reading makes use of the internet?
- 2 Look at several pages from a daily newspaper. What kinds of texts does it contain? What kinds of reading skills are needed to read them?
- 3 Examine a textbook for teaching reading. What kinds of reading skills does it practise? Does it also practise reading strategies?
- 4 Choose an authentic text that could be used with a reading class. What kinds of difficulties does the text contain? How could these be dealt with in teaching?

- 5 Examine an academic textbook used in a content class. What kinds of texts does it contain? What kinds of reading skills does it assume?
- 6 Choose a reading strategy that is discussed in this chapter. Suggest how a teacher could model or demonstrate the use of this strategy.
- 7 Choose an article from a magazine or newspaper and develop questions or activities based on the text that require a) reading and making inferences, and b) critical reading.
- 8 Choose an article from a popular magazine and read it carefully. What kind of reader is it intended for? What kind of prior knowledge does it assume?
- 9 Examine three chapters from reading textbooks for ESL/ELT learners and review the exercise types they make use of. What kinds of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities do they make use of?

## Appendix 1:

# Extensive-reading lesson plan

Look at the lesson plan for an extensive-reading activity, provided by Peter Nicoll, a teacher and teacher educator in Auckland, New Zealand. Which part of the lesson would you do in class? Which part might you assign for homework?

- Aims:** To develop extensive reading skills.  
To encourage learners to read for pleasure.
- Materials:** A short story that the teacher likes a lot and thinks the learners will also enjoy.
- Level:** All levels, but make sure the language in the short story matches the level. Graded readers are helpful with this.
- Time:** About one to one-and-a-half hours.
- Preparation:** Find a suitable short story. Divide into about four sections. Prepare appropriate discussion / comprehension check questions.

**Procedure:**

- 1 Elicit and concept-check four reading sub-skills (skimming, scanning, intensive, extensive).
  - Which one is focused on least in most ESL/ELT classrooms? (Extensive.)
  - When do most people use the extensive reading sub-skill? (When reading for pleasure, e.g. a novel or a short story.)
  - Elicit and concept-check 'short story'.
  - Tell learners that they are going to read a short story.
- 2 Pose a discussion question that is appropriate to the story, e.g. if the story is about a relationship between a woman and her mother, ask students to describe their relationship with their mother. Students discuss in pairs or threes.
  - Get very brief feedback from one or two pairs/groups.
- 3 Students read the first section of the story. Try to make sure they don't read further. It's important to keep them as close together as possible. While they are reading, write up discussion questions on the [white]board. These questions should be aimed at clearing up any potential misunderstandings about the plot, e.g. 'Describe the two main characters; age, gender, relationship. When X said Y, what did she mean?', etc. If appropriate, you can also include some prediction questions, e.g. 'What happens next?' Three or four questions should be enough; you don't want to get bogged down here. When students have finished the first section, they discuss the questions in pairs or threes. Feed back, and ask if there's any vocabulary they don't know. Clarify as necessary.



- 4 Repeat Stage 3 with the remaining sections of the story.
- 5 At the end, include a question about the students' reaction to the story, e.g. 'Which characters did you like/dislike? Why? Did you like the story? Why? Why not?'
- 6 Encourage students to read more short stories. If they liked this one, encourage them to find more by the same author. If your school has a learning centre / library, make the connection for them. Encourage them to use the learning centre / library outside class time.

## Appendix 2:

# Students in the news

Sometimes the teaching of reading is combined with other skills, in this case, speaking. Look at the reading/discussion activity below, submitted by Brandon Narasaki, a teacher in Tokyo, Japan. Which of the concepts described in the section 'Conducting a reading lesson' do you see reflected in this activity?

### ACTIVITY PURPOSE

- To give students the opportunity to select their own readings related to class topics, or a topic of personal interest to each student, and gain experience in making their own materials for a discussion.
- To give students practice in leading group discussions.

### WHAT IS A READING CIRCLE?\*

Each group is made up of a group of three to four students who bring readings to class to discuss that relate to class topics. This activity provides a chance to find outside articles that students are interested in discussing with peers. Students will gather with a group of classmates to critically read and discuss a one- to two-page article in class that the group leader has prepared.

\* This concept has been adapted from the work of Harvey Daniels on literature circles: ([www.harveydaniels.com](http://www.harveydaniels.com)).

### THE GROUP LEADER'S RESPONSIBILITY

- Each student signs up for *one* week to be the leader for their group.
- A different leader will be decided upon for each session. Groups may be changed each session or kept the same for all reading circles, depending on the instructor's preference.

- The group leader for the week is responsible for:
  - Selecting the one- to two-page reading.
  - Preparing a vocabulary list of five to ten difficult words/phrases, underlining the words in the article, and providing a definition and part of speech.
  - Creating eight questions (four comprehension and four discussion questions) to facilitate the reading circle in-class discussion.
  - Providing copies of all materials for each member in the leader's reading circle (and to the instructor).
  - Leading and monitoring the discussion of the article among the group members. Group members are encouraged to ask questions throughout the activity, and leaders should be ready to answer questions related to article.
  - Making sure time is used effectively. The leader should be able to finish the entire handout (including all eight questions) and if finished before the allotted time, be able to continue the conversation topic with additional questions, or [by] answering any group questions that come about during the reading circle.

### **CHOOSING THE READING**

*Article topics:* The instructor may want to assign certain topics for each round of group readings or simply allow students to pick any article of interest. It is also useful to create a sign-up sheet so that each student chooses one session to be the group leader (and is responsible for having their handout ready on time). Example: Article topics could be fashion, pop culture, gender roles in society, diet, etc.

- The leader should consider the reading ability of his [or her] group when selecting articles. The article should be challenging, but not so difficult that the group members will struggle to understand the content.
- Some examples of resources where you can find readings – the internet, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, etc.

### **DAY OF ACTIVITY: IN-CLASS READING AND DISCUSSION**

\*\*\* The leader is completely responsible for facilitating his/her own group. (The instructor should participate as little as possible, but is encouraged to monitor each group to make sure they are on task.)

- 1 On the day of the activity, the group leader passes out his/her article and questions. Then he/she gives the group a brief explanation of the article and why he/she selected it.  
Note: The instructor may wish to have their group leaders assign reading the chosen article as homework, instead of reading the article in class. This option saves class time for either longer group discussions or moving on to the next class activity.

- 2 All members then read the article (if not already assigned as homework). While reading, be sure to mark difficult vocabulary and areas of the text that are difficult to understand. Individually, members should write down answers to all four comprehension questions provided by the leader.
- 3 The leader goes over the vocabulary list, and members raise questions they may have concerning the text or unknown vocabulary.
- 4 The leader checks answers to the comprehension questions.
- 5 Finally, the group answers and discusses the four discussion questions provided by the leader.
- 6 The leader makes sure each person in the group gives their opinion and that the group is not dominated by one person.

### TEACHER NOTES

- 1 It is best to set a predetermined time limit when assigning the reading circles so that the students can manage their time. It is also helpful if the instructor gives reminders of remaining time, in case some groups are working too fast or too slow. (I usually do a 15-minute, 5-minute and 1-minute warning.) The students should make use of all 30 minutes allotted and should not aim at finishing as fast as possible.
- 2 It is also good practice to elicit feedback from group members and group leaders about the usefulness of the reading-circle activity. I have found that every time I use this activity, more than 95% of my students find the activity useful and enjoyable. To elicit feedback about the activity, the instructor may choose to do a written form with preset questions or simply create a class discussion.
- 3 If time permits, it would be helpful to establish a series of deadlines for this assignment, including choosing a date to lead, choosing an article and completing the handout. The teacher may want to approve each article (for length, difficulty, appropriateness, etc.) before having the students start their handout. Students may also benefit from submitting at least one draft of their handout to the instructor ahead of time to ensure the questions make sense and are appropriate for the assignment.
- 4 Reading-circle leaders are highly encouraged to read their chosen article several times to make sure they understand the content. Their group members are obliged to ask questions about the article their leader has chosen, so the leader should be ready to answer.

## Appendix 3:

# Envy: is it hurting or helping you?

Look at the lesson from the textbook *Strategic Reading*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Richards and Eckstut-Didier, 2012). What do you think is the rationale for the sequence in which the exercises in the lesson occur?

Reading 2



## Envy: Is It Hurting or Helping You?

### Predicting

Look at the picture and the title of the reading. Then check (✓) the information that you think you will read about. Compare your answers with a partner.

- \_\_\_ 1. a definition of envy
- \_\_\_ 2. stories about people who have felt envy
- \_\_\_ 3. stories about people who have never felt envy
- \_\_\_ 4. reasons people feel envy
- \_\_\_ 5. advice on how to deal with envy
- \_\_\_ 6. results of a survey that asked people about envy

### Skimming

Skim the reading to find which topics are and are not in the reading. Then read the whole text.

“Sometimes I’m so envious of my friends, I hate them,” says Kimberly. “I was at dinner a month ago, celebrating a friend’s engagement. Suddenly I blurted out that 50 percent of marriages end in divorce. I was frustrated about not having a serious relationship myself. My envy took over, and I became a different person.”

- 2 Envy is the desire for what someone else has and resentment of that person for having it. Kimberly was envious, but that doesn't mean she is a bad person. "Everyone experiences envy – it's a normal human emotion," explains psychologist Karen Peterson.
- 3 Envy doesn't have to make us feel powerless and sorry for ourselves. Instead, it can motivate us to try to achieve what we want. There are effective ways for dealing with envy and turning it into something useful.
- 4 Kimberly's envy caused her to make the unkind remark about divorce. If you have a similar desire to express your envy in a negative way, stop yourself. Instead, think about what it is you're envious of. Kimberly admitted that when her friend announced her engagement, "it made me feel lonely and insecure." Once you figure out why you're envious, it's much easier to eventually grow from the experience. "Envy can be an excellent teacher," states Peterson, "as long as you are open to learning its lessons."
- 5 Lucy and her friend were both trying to get a better job at their company. Lucy thought that she would get the promotion, but things didn't work out that way. Instead, her friend got the job, and Lucy became upset and jealous. Full of envy, she started saying hurtful things about her friend. "That wasn't like me, but I couldn't think straight," she explains. Lucy said unkind things because not getting the job made her feel bad about herself, explains Peterson. Her reaction didn't make her feel better, though. It just strengthened her negative feelings. If something similar happens to you, Peterson says that you should try to understand why your friend got the promotion. That way you can learn from the experience instead of reacting in a negative way.
- 6 If you feel that getting what you want – marriage, a better job, lots of money – is impossible, remember that every big goal is made up of thousands of tiny steps. "Think of one or two small things that you could do each week to help you come closer to your ultimate goal. Then do them," advises Doreen Virtue, author of the book *I'd Change My Life If I Had More Time*.
- 7 Kimberly left her friend's party feeling guilty. She knew her behavior was wrong. But shortly after, she decided to make some changes that would improve her social life. That decision was the first step in developing a positive attitude and getting rid of her envy.

Adapted from *Cosmopolitan*

## A Comprehension Check

These statements are false. Change one word in each statement to make it true.

1. The emotion of envy is <sup>normal</sup>unusual in humans.
2. Envy is something that some people feel.
3. Envy can teach you a lot about others.
4. Envy makes you feel good about yourself.
5. When you feel envy, try asking yourself where you are feeling it.
6. If you want to avoid feeling envy, set goals that seem impossible to achieve.

## B Vocabulary Study

Find the words and phrases in *italics* in the reading. Are the meanings of the words and phrases in each pair similar or different? Write *S* (similar) or *D* (different).

- \_\_\_ 1. *envious* (par. 1) / *jealous* (par. 5)
- \_\_\_ 2. *blurted out* (par. 1) / *said* (par. 5)
- \_\_\_ 3. *engagement* (par. 1) / *divorce* (par. 1)
- \_\_\_ 4. *resentment* (par. 2) / *reaction* (par. 5)
- \_\_\_ 5. *figure out* (par. 4) / *understand* (par. 5)
- \_\_\_ 6. *insecure* (par. 4) / *upset* (par. 5)
- \_\_\_ 7. *think straight* (par. 5) / *remember* (par. 6)
- \_\_\_ 8. *lonely* (par. 4) / *guilty* (par. 7)

## C Making Inferences

Sometimes the reader must infer, or figure out, what the writer did not explain or state directly in a text.

Which person in the reading could have said each of the following statements? Write *Kimberly, Lucy, Doreen, or Karen*.

I expected to get the better job.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

I wish I were engaged.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

My friend isn't a better worker than I am.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you envy someone, make some changes in your life.

4. \_\_\_\_\_

I get envious at times, just like everyone else.

5. \_\_\_\_\_

My friends have a better social life than I do.

6. \_\_\_\_\_

## D Relating Reading to Personal Experience

Discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. What advice would you give to someone who is envious of a friend who: a. gets a promotion at work? b. always looks good? c. gets invited to a lot of parties?
2. Have you ever had an experience that showed you how envy could be "an excellent teacher"? Explain your answer.
3. Do you think that this statement from the reading is true: "Everyone experiences envy – it's a normal human emotion."? Why or why not?

## Further reading

- Aebbersold, J. A. and Field, M. (1997) *From Reader to Reading Teacher*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W. (2009) *Reading in a Second Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hudson, T. (2007) *Teaching Second Language Reading*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, R. H. and Hafner, C. A. (2012) *Understanding Digital Literacies*, London: Routledge.
- Koda, K. (2004) *Insights into Second Language Reading*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nuttall, C. (1996) *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Heinemann.
- Thornbury, S. (2005c) *Beyond The Sentence: Introducing Discourse Analysis*, Oxford: Macmillan.