
Being an Effective Reader (Reading Skills and Styles)

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Introduction

Reading is a gateway to a whole universe of learning and enjoyment. Reading offers us a big opportunity to interact with a variety of written texts (material) such as books, newspapers, magazines, stories, manuals, poems, textbooks, articles, instructions, computers, screens, etc., for different purposes ranging from reading for school, for fun, for a specific piece of knowledge, etc. For some readers, this skill (activity) is easy; for others, it is a hard task. This is mainly noticeable in schools and colleges where students face great hardships in reading for study. Therefore, teachers should be aware of this, and instruct their students on becoming effective readers.

Researchers agree that reading is **a complex process involving several operations**. However, when we read in a second language (or foreign language), the process is even more **complex** because of the **cognitive capacities** and **first language interference with the second language**.

1. Definition :

There are many definitions given to the term reading:

- Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print.

- Reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading materials in building meaning, (Anderson, 1999)
- Reading is converting print into language and then to the message intended by the author, (Koda, 2007)
- Reading is the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading. (R and Reading, Study Group, 2002)

All these definitions have at their core the term “meaning” which reflects deliberate engagement in thinking processes by readers. However, the construction of “meaning” is influenced mainly by two factors:

- the kind of text being read and its contents, and
- by the purpose of reading.

Other researchers claim that other factors are vital for getting meaning from written material. These include the reader’s prior knowledge and experiences, and the nature of the reading. Whatever the type of the written text is, researchers agree that different kinds of written works require different skills to read them.

Hence, students need to know the essential elements of distinct kinds of writing they are likely to be asked to read in order to read well in university courses. Knowing the purpose of reading is a key element to more active, effective reading.

2. Purpose of reading:

The purpose is the WHY of the reading plan. Knowing the reason for which you are reading, can help you find a focus. The purpose can be determined by the reader himself or his instructor. Here are some:

- A. **Reading to comprehend an idea:** To understand a new idea or concept or a new way to solve a problem.
- B. **Reading to connect ideas together:** All reading tells a story, and when you read you can understand how individual parts of the story connect to one another; how things are interconnected (logic).
- C. **Reading to learn more:** Sometimes, we need to get a general picture of something as part of a lesson or assignment. But later we may want to read more about that idea or concept (reading on our own)
- D. **Reading for a test:** Although this is an essential activity, it cannot be a primary purpose for reading. We must read to learn first, then read to test our knowledge.

- E. **Reading to appreciate literature:** It is necessary to read fiction, such as novels, poetry or plays to learn about the customs traditions, and culture of other peoples which facilitate tolerance and understanding between nations and cultures.
- F. **Reading for pleasure (fun):** Some people like reading for their own pleasure. Genres and types of writing may vary from one reader to another (science fiction, horror, romance ...)

3. Importance of reading:

Reading is important because it:

- ✓ **develops the mind:** The mind is a muscle which needs exercise. When you read you engage in various mental processes to understand the meaning. Thus, the more you read, the more your cognitive abilities and skills grow.
- ✓ **develops imagination:** With reading, you can go anywhere in the world or even out of it. This world of imagination shows you that nothing is impossible. You can experience new things and view the world from different angles. This boosts creativity and the power of prediction.
- ✓ **improves self-image:** When you read, your understanding of the world develops. This enhances your self-esteem and improves your self-confidence. It builds your personality and shapes your thought and attitudes.
- ✓ **develops knowledge, skills and strategies:** the more we engage in the reading activity, the more we gain knowledge and experience, and the more we improve our reading skills and strategies (ever-lasting training)
- ✓ **is a good communication tool:** Messages transmitted through reading enable us to communicate better with people either through writing or orally. People who can't read (illiterate) can be easily controlled and manipulated.

4. Reading Skills:

A reading Skill is an acquired ability to do well; proficiency. The use of a skill is effortless and automatic (habit). It is also referred to as an ability or capacity acquired through a deliberate systematic and sustained effort to carry out complex activities. There are many reading skills:

- ✓ previewing (* predicting/anticipating)
- ✓ forming/answering questions
- ✓ constructing mental images
- ✓ making associations (connections)
- ✓ summarising
- ✓ using graphic organisers
- ✓ concentrating
- ✓ making annotations
- ✓ adjusting speed
- ✓ reading selectively

- ✓ looking for signposts
- ✓ testing by reading
- ✓ explaining to someone
- ✓ underlining/highlighting
- ✓ re-reading
- ✓ inferring
- ✓ reading critically

The benefits of reading skills include, among many others, maximising understanding, saving and managing time effectively, enhancing fluent reading, and improving reading scores (IELTS, CELTA, TOFEL...).

5. Reading Styles (Types)

There are six major reading styles:

5.1 Skimming:

- **Skimming** is reading for gist. Skim reading is useful when we want to get a quick impression or general overview /idea of a book or article, etc.
- **Skimming** refers to the way of reading in which readers quickly run their eyes across a text for its gist. It is useful when we have to read a large amount of material in a short amount of time or have to review information.
- **Use:** look for “signposts”: chapter headings, sub-headings, lists, figures, read the first/last paragraphs, read the first/last sentences of a paragraph, and make notes of keywords, phrases and points to summarise the main themes. Ignore the detail contained in supporting sentences. Try to answer the five WH questions: Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

5.2 Scanning:

Scanning is reading for specific information. It is useful when we want to locate a quickly specific piece of information within a reading material without necessarily reading through the whole material. In scanning we know what we are looking for, that’s why we don’t need to pay attention to other information.

Scanning saves you time and can be combined with skimming to maximize comprehension. For example, searching through a telephone directory or reading an advertisement are two good examples of the scanning technique.

Use: Run your eyes down the page, and look for boldface print, italics, or any other terms which stand out from the surrounding text. Focus on numbers, places, names, questions, and notes in the margins. Focus on finding the answer.

5.3 Deep study reading:

Deep study reading is reading to learn. It is also called *in-depth reading*, *detailed reading*, *detailed reading*, and *careful reading*. It's useful when want to extract accurate information, make connections, understand concepts and meanings, consider implications, and evaluate arguments.

The reader attempts to handle detailed information in the text which can be complex and difficult to comprehend such as school/college subjects. That is why the reading rate (speed) seems to be slower than in skimming or scanning, and readers often require reading and connecting information with background knowledge.

Use: Survey contents, titles, and chapters. Analyse the title (what you already know and what's the purpose of the text) read the text word for word, do not skip words, and use the dictionary to explain new words. Take notes, review what you learnt, read aloud your notes, and test your understanding.

5.4 Extensive reading:

Extensive reading is reading as much material as possible for pleasure and general language development. It involves reading silently, quickly, and at one's pace/speed. This type of reading is useful for improving students' word recognition, fluency, speed and inference skills.

Within **extensive reading**, students choose what they read according to their level and interests, read (generally out of class) independently of a teacher, can skip whole parts or just stop reading whenever they consider the material not interesting or too difficult. Extensive reading can be carried out through graded readers or simplified, texts on the same topic, authentic materials (newspapers versus magazines), stories, articles, web sources, etc

Generally, **extensive reading** aims *at building reader confidence and enjoyment, and general understanding*. In short, extensive reading is about “**learning to read.**” It can be introduced to all kinds of EFL classes.

5.5 Intensive reading:

Intensive reading (or narrow reading) is reading a limited piece of writing slowly and slightly with specific learning aims and tasks. It may involve students reading selections by the same author or several texts about the same topic. When this occurs, content and grammatical structures repeat themselves and students may get opportunities to understand the meanings of the text.

The more familiar the reader is with the text; the more comprehension is promoted. **Intensive readers** must read carefully to remember the details and understand all the words

and meanings of the text. **Intensive reading** is generally directed by the teacher whose role is an organiser, observer, feedback provider, and prompter.

Intensive reading aims at building more language knowledge than practising the skill of reading. **Intensive reading** is about “reading to learn.”

It is carried out in very short texts (about 500-words long) chosen by the teacher considering the level of difficulty. (Reading shorter texts for detailed information with emphasis and precise understanding). Activities may include finding main ideas, making inferences, identifying words, answering questions, etc.

5.6 Browsing:

Browsing is reading for no specific goals. It involves taking a boarder view of the subject, which in turn provides you with a stronger base that can be developed through specific reading.

We often browse magazines or newspapers just for fun. Still, browsing enables us to build up a sense of how languages fit together and to enrich our knowledge of various topics like culture, politics, sports etc.

Conclusion:

Reading is one of the major language skills that need constant improvement through the use of useful skills, styles and strategies. It affects other language skills and boosts comprehension and critical thinking. On that basis, students should strive to develop their reading techniques to enhance comprehension and ensure more effective communication inside or outside the university.