Teaching reading

At some stage in a typical week, an ESL teacher will focus on the teaching of reading. How and what they choose to teach depends on the students' needs and their own approach to teaching. This practical book provides the teacher with a range of ideas for the classroom that can be called upon at various points of the teaching and learning cycle. It aims to incorporate recent research on reading strategies, vocabulary development, reading fluency and extensive reading into a text-based approach to language teaching. Issues covered include: incorporating reading into a language program, selecting reading texts, teaching reading skills and strategies, reading for meaning, and developing vocabulary through reading. This book consists of a brief overview of current theory followed by strategies and practical suggestions from practising teachers. ESL teachers and trainers running professional development courses will find this a very useful book.

The Professional Development Collection consists of short, practical books on teaching topics drawn from recent research projects. The Collection aims to help teachers keep up to date with specific areas of classroom practice by drawing together research, theory and practice. Other books in the series include: Monitoring learner progress, Teaching disparate learner groups, Developing critical literacy and Using new technology in the classroom.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COLLECTION

Teaching reading

National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
Teaching reading

Jen Tindale
Series editor: Anne Burns
Introduction to the series

This book is part of a series that draws on recent research projects conducted in the Australasia adult ESL context. The aim of the series is to explore some of the findings from these projects and some of the general literature in the area in order to suggest implications and ideas for classroom practice. Thus, the series attempts to draw together research, theory and practice in a way that is accessible to practising teachers.

The focus of this book is on teaching reading in the classroom and it can be used by teachers at various points within the teaching and learning cycle. It aims to incorporate recent research on reading strategies, vocabulary development, reading fluency and extensive reading into a text-based approach to language teaching. Some of the issues covered include incorporating reading into a language program, selecting texts, teaching reading skills and strategies, and developing reading fluency.

The main body of the book summarises, in point form, the principal findings on teaching reading and then offers practical suggestions for activities that will help teachers examine the issues for themselves in their own classroom. The findings and suggestions are supported, and in some cases expanded upon, by quotations from the papers themselves. Where appropriate, examples are also provided. For ease of reading, the supporting quotations appear on the left-hand pages, opposite the findings or suggestions to which they are addressed. However, both pages are equally important in the discussion and contribute to a fuller understanding of teaching reading.

At the back of the book there is a list of references from which quotations have been taken. This list provides a broad overview of the current work in the area. Other useful works are listed under ‘Further reading’ in the Bibliography.
Introduction

Almost all ESL teachers, regardless of the level of their students or the goals of their program, will at some point in their teaching week focus on the teaching of reading. What they choose to teach and how they teach it will vary, depending on – among many other factors – their own approach to teaching, as well as their students’ needs and goals.

This book provides a set of ideas for the classroom, based on research, that can be called on by teachers at various points within the cycle of teaching and learning, as students ‘learn language … learn through language … [and] learn about language’ (Halliday 1992: 19). Although this book looks at reading as a discrete macroskill, it is generally aimed at ESL teachers who teach reading as part of a course that integrates reading, writing, speaking and listening.

What is reading?

Reading is a complex cognitive task, seen variously (depending on the theoretical approach) as being dependent on either:

> information processing/decoding skills (bottom-up skills)
> background knowledge (top-down skills)
> an interaction between bottom-up and top-down skills, or
> a complex mix of top-down and bottom-up skills combined with social experiences (new literacy approaches).

It is beyond the scope of this book to describe each of these theories or models of the reading process in detail (for a summary see Hood et al 1996; Burns and de Silva Joyce 2000a). What is of interest here is what these theories mean for teachers whose students are having difficulties in reading in English.

Bottom-up approaches to reading are based on the view that readers learn to read by decoding, and that reading difficulties can be remedied through the development of phonic skills. Bottom-up approaches generally see reading skills as developing at the level of word recognition, with little connection to context or to the readers’ background knowledge.

Top-down approaches, based on psycholinguistic views of reading, place less emphasis on the role of decoding, seeing reading as a process of guessing meaning from context with the support of background knowledge.
Effective teachers have always been eclectic, selecting strategically from the array of available approaches to ensure their learners have the best possible learning experience and outcomes … A text-based syllabus is one way of establishing a coherent, cohesive and comprehensive framework. It is a global approach within which the best aspects of other syllabus models can be used. (Feez 1998: 13)

It is more productive for teachers to look at ways of incorporating the insights derived from different perspectives [on reading] than to look for one superior theory to help understand the nature of reading. In this way we can develop classroom activities that prepare our students for the multifaceted phenomenon that reading is. (Williams 1999: 24)

Genres provide ways for responding to recurring communicative situations. They further provide a frame that allows individuals to orient to and interpret particular communicative events. Making this genre knowledge-explicit can provide language learners with the knowledge and skills they need to communicate successfully in particular discourse communities. It can also provide learners with access to socially powerful forms of language. (Paltridge 2001: 3)

Reading difficulties are attributed to poor reading strategies, and are remedied by a focus on strategies such as finding main ideas and guessing from context. Research indicates that students’ reading difficulties are more likely to stem from a lack of language knowledge related to reading, rather than poor reading ability as such. Cobb and Horst (2001: 317) argue that if weak L2 reading ‘is a reading problem, then poor readers are poor readers in any language, and there is little a language course can do for them other than to remediate their general reading skills’.

Interactive approaches see reading as a process of interaction between top-down and bottom-up skills, advocating a combination of language development, decoding and strategy development. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), interactive models are flawed, as the two types of processes (lower and higher level) are incompatible. They concede that a modified interactive approach may be used to explain general reading, but this does not account for the different processes used when reading for different purposes.

New literacy approaches situate reading within a broader social and cultural context, moving away from the idea of reading as simply a neutral cognitive skill. Within these approaches, reading difficulties can be seen to stem from an inability to access the meaning of texts, and can be addressed through activities that focus on a combination of ‘decoding skills, cognitive processes and social experiences’ (Burns and de Silva Joyce 2000a: xi). Freebody and Luke (1990: 15), for example, identify the need for language programs to address the four related roles of readers ‘systematically, explicitly and at all developmental points:

> code breaker (“How do I crack this?”);
> text participant (“What does this mean?”);
> text user (“What do I do within this, here and now?”); and
> text analyst (“What does all this do to me?”).

Reading in a text-based approach to teaching and learning

Butt et al (2000: 15) take the view that a text is a ‘whole, harmonious collection of meanings that has unity of purpose’. In a text-based approach to teaching and learning, whole texts in context are taken as the organising principle for syllabus design. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are integrated in a cycle of teaching and learning designed to ‘develop the knowledge and skills to deal with written and spoken texts in social contexts’ (Feez 1998: 24). Within the
Reading may be ... for all students, not a weapon used to regulate them socially, but a technology by which they may achieve the maximum range of choices in all facets of their lives. (Cranny-Francis 1996: 188)

New literacy approaches argue that reading processes are inherently contextual and relative, and need to be understood in relation to broader cultural and social roles and purposes. In this approach, different cultural views of literacy will lead to different ways of using and interpreting written texts and, in turn, the meanings drawn from texts will depend upon the reading task and its social context ...

Theorists who adopt a critical discourse perspective argue that any one text can have multiple ‘readings’. These multiple readings come from readers who approach a text from different viewpoints, experiences and values ... (Burns and de Silva Joyce 2000a: xi)

Advocates of ‘skills-based’ and ‘critical’ approaches to reading may indeed be giving an implicit priority to one aspect of literacy use over another. We operate from the position that literacy is a social practice, with political and economic potentials and ramifications. It is not that one program affords ‘literacy’ and one does not; rather, distinct programs afford distinct ‘literacies’. (Freebody and Luke 1990: 15)

The aim of this book is to incorporate recent research on reading strategies, vocabulary development, reading fluency and extensive reading into a text-based approach to language teaching. Some of the issues addressed include:

- incorporating reading into a language program
- selecting reading texts
- teaching reading skills and strategies
- developing vocabulary through reading
- reading for meaning
- developing reading fluency.

The final chapter contains some suggestions for teachers and students to carry out their own reading research. It suggests some research questions based on issues raised in previous chapters, as a possible springboard for teachers to reflect on their own practice. It concludes with the words of Auerbach and Paxton (1997: 257) on the value of giving learners the tools to research their own reading: ‘... it may be that this stance of enquiry gave them the greatest sense of control and confidence in approaching English reading’. Confidence, control and enjoyment of reading are possibly the key to the development of reading skills, as ‘people learn to read, and to read better, by reading’ (Eskey 1986: 21).
Learner needs

What factors need to be considered when analysing students’ reading needs?

How can information about student needs be collected and used?

Findings

> It is important to recognise that many learners will already be proficient readers in their first language. Their ability to read in a second language will be influenced more by their level of proficiency in L2 than by their L1 reading abilities.

> When analysing students’ reading needs, consider their level of competence in reading English; their goals and purposes for improving reading skills; the demands for literacy in the wider world; the role of reading as a resource for learning; their previous formal learning experiences and linguistic resources for learning to read; and their access to English language use.

> Involve students in analysing their own reading needs (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 15).

> Information about student needs – collected through placement documents, student self-assessment, and diagnostic assessment – can be used to identify the contexts in which the learners need to use language; the types and natures of the texts that need to be learned; student strengths and weaknesses in oracy and literacy; and student strengths and weaknesses in specific skills and strategies.

(Sources: Hood et al 1996; Feez 1998; Cobb and Horst 2001; Grabe and Stoller 2002)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Gather information to answer the following questions about your students:
  - What kinds of texts or genres can they confidently manage?
  - What kinds of texts or genres present difficulties?
  - What are their attitudes to reading in English?
  - What are their previous experiences with reading in English?
  - How fluently can they read particular kinds of texts?
  - What range of strategies do they use to read, and how appropriate are these strategies for the text type and reading purpose?
  - Are students aware of how they read, of what strategies they use?
  - What language (text organisation or discourse structure, grammar, vocabulary) presents difficulties?
  - Can they get at explicit meanings in texts?
  - Can they get at implicit meanings in texts?
  - What information do they get from the text?
  - Can they read critically for underlying assumptions and attitudes?

(Adapted from Hood et al 1996: 108)

> Have students carry out a class survey to explore their L1 and L2 reading practices. Questions could include:
  - What do you read regularly in your own language? (for practical personal purposes, for pleasure/relaxation, for work/study)
  - What do you read in English? (for practical personal purposes, for pleasure/relaxation, for work/study)
  - What would you like to read in English, but don’t or can’t? Give reasons for your answer.
  - In what ways does reading help your general language learning?
  - Which strategies do you find most difficult? (list strategies: eg skimming, scanning, predicting, reading for detail)
  - Why do you find these skills difficult?

(Adapted from Given 2000: 39–40; MacPhail 2000: 49)
What factors need to be considered when incorporating reading into a language program?

What is the relationship between reading and writing, speaking and listening?

Findings

> There is a clear relationship between the development of reading skills and the other macroskills. A well-planned language program will integrate reading and writing, speaking and listening.

> Reading can be integrated with writing by providing the opportunity to read and analyse the language features and structures of a range of texts to use as models for students’ own writing.

> Researchers advocate the explicit teaching of grammar as part of a genre- or text-based approach to reading and writing.

> L1 and L2 research suggests that extensive reading develops language knowledge (vocabulary, fluency, syntactic knowledge, semantic memory, metalinguistic awareness, general knowledge) that supports writing ability.

> Reading can be integrated with the development of speaking and listening skills (e.g., in a text-based approach, the context of a text can be explored through a range of speaking and listening activities; reading aloud can provide pronunciation practice; a written text can be used to provide content and vocabulary for speaking activities such as discussions and role plays).

(Sources: Callaghan et al 1993; Day and Bamford 1998; Feez 1998; Butt et al 2000; Grabe 2001)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Explore a text-based approach to planning your language program.

> Plan to provide a balance of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency development (Nation 2000).

> Use information about students’ needs, including their goals and purposes for reading (see Chapter 1), as the basis for deciding which texts to include.

> Use the same (carefully selected) texts for more than one purpose:
  - for content
  - to develop vocabulary
  - to examine the language features and structure of a text type
  - to use as models for writing texts of a similar type
  - to develop or practise reading skills and strategies
  - to develop reading fluency
  - to develop critical thinking skills.

> Have students focus on why they are reading a selected text:
  - learning or finding out about something
  - finding out what the writer thinks about something
  - exploiting the text for new vocabulary (see Chapter 4).

(Adapted from Wilson 2003)

> Consider the importance of reading to students’ general language learning. Allow time to read texts less relevant (to future goals) or less demanding texts (see Chapter 6). Plan to provide some time for ‘fun’ reading activities.

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It is important that we plan our classroom reading activities with two sets of purposes in mind. The first of these is to help our students derive meaning from the sorts of English texts they are likely to encounter, and the second is that we also bear in mind the importance and value of reading for the contribution that it makes to overall language acquisition of our students. In this sense we need to be careful to structure reading activities so that the needs of relevance and general language learning are both addressed.

(Williams 1999: 25)

Reading aloud is something which has fallen into disrepute over the years, but it is clear from … the projects outlined in this book that students see it as a valuable activity for a number of reasons. They see reading aloud as:

– providing a model for pronunciation
– making links between letters and sounds
– providing practice in intonation patterns
– supporting the development of vocabulary.

(Burns and de Silva Joyce 2000b: 34)

Suggestions for the classroom

> Sequence texts progressively based on one or more of the following:

**Field (topic or content)**

As the unit of work progresses, learners work with examples of the text type in the context of different topics. Begin with a topic that is familiar to the learners in an appropriate learning domain. Topics can be selected on the basis of:

– knowledge and vocabulary from earlier units of work that will be recycled
– knowledge and vocabulary from later units of work that will be pre-taught
– a new topic that will be introduced for variety.

**Tenor (relationship between reader and writer)**

As the unit of work progresses, learners work with examples of the text type in which the roles and the relationships of the users of the text type change.

**Mode (channel of communication)**

As the unit progresses, learners work with examples of the text type in spoken and written form, and from the perspective of more than one of the macroskills (listening, speaking, reading, writing).

(Adapted from Feez 1998: 115)
Selection of reading texts

When texts share the same general purpose in the culture, they will often share the same obligatory and optional structural elements, and so they belong to the same genre or text type … Different social purposes will produce texts with distinct structural elements, each of which contributes to the achievement of the text’s purpose.

(Butt et al. 2000: 9, 10)

The text types students study in a course need to be linked and contextualised with topics or real-life social activities which have direct relevance to student needs.

(Feez 1998: 84)

If language courses make use of a limited range of text types, learners will meet a limited range of grammatical and lexical features. If learners have special purposes, then the appropriate text types must be used. If learners have wide general purposes, then their course should include the full range of text types …

Text types are an important consideration in the design of language course, because familiarity with the important text types and the patterns that lie behind them will strongly affect the ease with which learners read and the skill with which they write.

(Nation 2000: 625)

In an academic English course where students are responsible for text selection and texts are most often selected on the basis of relevance to future studies, familiarity is developed with aspects of future fields of study and instances of field-specific terminology.

(Cope 2002: 82)

Findings

> In a text-based approach, texts are defined as ‘any stretch of language which is held together cohesively through meaning’ (Feez 1998: 4).

> Texts should be selected according to learner needs and interests, program goals and objectives, and the social contexts in which learners will use language. Where possible or appropriate, involve students in text selection.

> Classroom research reported by Burns and de Silva Joyce (2000a: xiii) ‘challenges current thinking about the need for students to deal always with authentic texts’. They advocate the use of readers and carefully simplified texts as a scaffold towards authentic texts.

> Graded reading texts (readers) have been criticised for being unauthentic, sometimes poorly written, and for using language as a vehicle for form or vocabulary, rather than meaning. These are problems that can be overcome by considering why, when and how readers are used, selecting texts carefully, and using a checklist to evaluate texts (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 25).
Suggestions for the classroom

Selecting texts

> Explain to students your reasons for selecting particular texts.

> Where possible, involve students in the process of selecting texts: encourage students to find and bring in their own texts.

> Use a checklist to evaluate the content of texts:
  - Is the text interesting and motivating?
  - Does the content relate to other texts/topics covered in the course and to program goals and objectives?
  - Does the content relate to students’ life experiences and social, community, workplace or study needs?

(Adapted from Hood et al 1996: 56)

> Consider the text type when selecting texts:
  - What types of texts are students likely to encounter outside the classroom? How will the texts used in class prepare students for these texts?

> Consider the level of difficulty when selecting texts. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Are texts culturally and contextually accessible?
  - For what purpose will the text be read (eg for details, for gist)?
  - Is the language of the text more ‘written’ or more ‘spoken’?

(Adapted from Hood et al 1996: 58)

> Consider learning goals when selecting texts. Make a distinction between:
  - texts for content
  - texts for language or vocabulary development
  - texts for fluency development
  - texts for extensive reading (for language growth or fluency development)

(Adapted from Hood et al 1996: 64)
Simplifying texts

Following is a list of issues to consider when simplifying texts:

- **Organisation of the text**
  - What is the purpose of the document?
  - Does the organisation of information support the purpose?
  - Would it be easier to read if the sequence of information was changed?

- **Vocabulary**
  - Is an understanding of technical or low-frequency vocabulary needed by the reader?
  - Can low-frequency vocabulary items be replaced with higher-frequency alternatives or known words?
  - Do technical terms or low-frequency words need to be elaborated?

- **Interpersonal meanings**
  - What is the role relationship between the reader and the writer?
  - How negotiable is the information?
  - How personal should the language be?

- **Register**
  - How appropriate is a more conversational style?
  - How ‘spoken’ or ‘written’ should the language be?

(Adapted from Hood et al 1996: 64; Nation 2000: 93, 172)

- Follow principles of discourse organisation when simplifying academic texts: add explanations; make connections obvious; link events and people more directly; make sure that given information generally precedes new information in each sentence.

(Adapted from Beck, McKeown, Sinatra and Loxterman 1991: in Grabe and Stoller 2002: 112)

- Consider alternatives to simplification (eg elaboration – see Nation 2000: 173)

Graded readers are … criticised because they provide poor conditions for learning (Yano, Long and Ross 1994). These criticisms include the following: 1) Reading graded readers that are pitched lower than the learners’ level can lower the quality of their output; 2) Removing difficult vocabulary denies learners access to what they need to learn; 3) Reading texts with little unknown vocabulary discourages the development of generalisable coping skills, such as guessing from context and vocabulary use. (Nation and Deweerdt 2001: 57)

We need to see simplification as one of a range of options for making text accessible. Each of the options – simplification, elaboration, easification, negotiation – has its own particular strengths and values. Rather than focusing on which one is best, we need to look at what each has to offer and how each can be used to best effect. Teachers need an expanded range of options, not a reduced one. (Nation 2000: 172–73)

Beck, McKeown, Sinatra and Loxterman (1991) … revised [an academic] text … using select discourse-organisation principles … The results of the study showed that students understood the revised text significantly better than the original version, recalling significantly more information and scoring significantly higher on comprehension questions … [demonstrating] that texts can be made more comprehensible in principled ways following major concepts from discourse analysis (as opposed to formulaic simplification rules). (Grabe and Stoller 2002: 112–13)

**Vocabulary development**

How can building vocabulary improve reading?

How can reading assist learners’ vocabulary development?

**Findings**

> Reading and vocabulary building are mutually beneficial in L1 and L2 reading.

> Fluent reading depends in part on having a large sight vocabulary and a wide general vocabulary. A reader’s sight vocabulary includes words that are so familiar they are automatically recognised.

> A vocabulary threshold exists, below which readers will be unlikely to comprehend a text. For adequate comprehension, research suggests that learners need to know 98 per cent of the words in a text – or one unknown word to every 50–100 words.

> The best vocabulary gains from reading are made when reading is supplemented by word-focused activities, including activities that extend word knowledge, as well as composition writing, gap-fills and sentence writing.

> Knowledge about a word includes knowledge of its meaning; written form; spoken form; grammatical behaviour; collocations; register; associations; frequency; word family; word stems and affixes.

> Extensive reading contributes more to vocabulary development when target vocabulary is repeated throughout reading texts, and when extensive reading is followed up with activities that focus directly on vocabulary.

*(Sources: Day and Bamford 1998; Nation 1990, 2000; Hu and Nation 2000)*

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**What Researchers say**

One of the major findings [of research reported here] was that learners identified the development of more effective vocabulary learning strategies as a key factor in learning to read in English. (Burns and de Silva Joyce 2001: viii)

[A study by Schoonen, Hulstijn and Bossers (1998)] demonstrates the strong connection between reading and vocabulary in both L1 and L2 contexts … [I]n comparing the factors contributing to L1 and L2 reading, the researchers found that vocabulary knowledge had a greater influence on L2 reading than on L1 reading, particularly at lower proficiency levels. (Grabe and Stoller 2002: 147)

Word knowledge is the key ingredient in successful reading both in L1 (Freebody and Anderson 1981) and L2 (Cooper 1984), contributing more to L2 academic reading success than other kinds of linguistic knowledge including syntax. (Saville-Troike 1984.)

Cobb and Horst 2001: 318

The case for reading as an aid to vocabulary learning seems to be strong, both in terms of providing the repetition necessary to establish new words in the learners’ mind and in supplying the different contexts necessary to elaborate and expand the richness of knowledge about those words. (Schmitt and Carter 2000: 4–5)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Help students to choose useful vocabulary to learn:
  > – high-frequency words (e.g., words that appear on the General Service Word List – see Bauman 2003), or for students with academic goals, words on the Academic Word List (Coxhead 2003);
  > – words that are important for them to learn (e.g., for particular community, workplace or study needs).

> Focus on target vocabulary in reading texts:
  > – Have students identify high-frequency words in texts.
  > – Have students discuss the meaning of target vocabulary.
  > – Discuss the word choices made by the writer (e.g., adjectives used in descriptions of people or places).
  > – Note occurrences of words from the same word family, and identify stems and affixes.
  > – Identify words that help the text hang together (lexical cohesion).
  > – Plan activities that extend students’ knowledge of target words (e.g., meaning, word family, collocations).
  > – Encourage the use of vocabulary notebooks (see Practical examples within this chapter).

> Ask students to reflect on and discuss their approaches to learning new vocabulary: e.g., How do you choose words to learn? How do you learn new words? Are some words easier to learn? Why?

> Teach students strategies to learn target vocabulary (e.g., using word cards with target word on one side and L1 translation on the other to encourage retrieval).

> Encourage students to monitor their own vocabulary development by: keeping a weekly record of words learned; testing themselves or other students on target vocabulary; keeping a journal or writing portfolio as a record of their vocabulary use.

> Provide opportunities to revise and recycle target vocabulary by setting several texts on the same subject (‘narrow reading’ – see Chapter 8), and set out-of-class tasks that focus on target vocabulary.

What Researchers Say

Reading is not necessarily the main, nor the best, source of vocabulary learning in a second or foreign language. Research shows that word gains from reading activities alone are very small, regardless of whether learners read short or long texts. (Laufer 2001: 52)

One of the most important ways to develop skilled reading is to help learners increase their vocabulary. Both explicit and incidental approaches are important. (Burns 2003)

In L2 reading contexts it is now recognised that the best way to develop … a large vocabulary is to read extensively, but this knowledge has not translated over to many L2 instruction contexts. In few L2 teaching contexts is silent, free reading in class seen as important, nor is extensive reading at home treated as a high priority. (Grabe 1995: 43)
Almost all [students in this study] showed a preoccupation with meaning, often at the expense of other crucial aspects of word knowledge, and many … believed that a first language translation was sufficient to enable effective use of words. Several expressed their lack of interest in depth of word knowledge, stating that aspects of word knowledge such as collocations and other words in the same word family were only learned to fulfil course requirements …

This dismissal of word knowledge other than meaning was clearly articulated [by many of the students interviewed], demonstrating a general lack of awareness as to how depth of vocabulary knowledge might contribute to ability to use the items both productively and receptively.

(Moir and Nation 2002: 23)

For explicit learning, recycling has to be built into any study program … This implies a more structured way of presenting vocabulary that reintroduces words repeatedly in classroom activities. Learning activities themselves need to be designed to require multiple manipulations of a word, such as in vocabulary notebooks in which students have to go back and add additional information about the words.

(Schmitt 2000: 137)
Skills and strategies

What is the difference between reading skills and reading strategies?

How and when do readers use different reading strategies?

Are different reading strategies needed to read online texts?

Findings

> Reading skills are generally defined as automatic processing abilities, whereas strategies are deliberate actions performed to achieve a particular goal. A skill can become a strategy when it is used intentionally.

> Individual readers use different reading strategies for different types of texts, in different contexts, and when reading for different purposes (see reading strategies listed in Practical examples within this chapter).

> The use of reading strategies requires knowledge of strategies (metacognition), and motivation to use them. Metacognitive ability includes both the knowledge of cognition (declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge, or ‘knowing what, how and why’), and the regulation of cognition (the ability to plan, monitor, test, revise and evaluate strategies).

> Knowledge of reading strategies does not make up for a lack of language knowledge in L2: only where learners have sufficient language knowledge does providing instruction in text structure and reading strategies lead to more advanced reading abilities.

> Reading online texts requires similar reading strategies to reading paper-based texts, together with critical reading skills.

(Sources: Carrell 1998; Grabe and Stoller 2002; Sutherland-Smith 2002)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Assist students to transfer their L1 reading strategies to L2 by discussing and reflecting on their L1 strategies. For example: Think about a text of this type you have read in your first language. Why did you read the text? (eg for information, for entertainment). How did you get the information you wanted from the text? What helped you to find this information? Did you read every word of the text?

> Teach strategies explicitly, but not in isolation. Learners can use strategies more effectively if they are taught in the context of 1) texts and their social purposes, and 2) particular purposes for reading.

> Model reading strategies for students (eg demonstrate your own use of reading strategies while reading a text aloud).

> Encourage students to practise and reflect on the effectiveness of using different strategies to read a range of text types (including online texts if appropriate). Have students discuss questions such as: How is the text organised? (paragraphs, subheadings etc). Do headings, pictures or diagrams help you guess what the text is about? What do you already know about the topic? What parts of the text will you read in detail to find specific information? What will you do when you find an unknown word?

> Monitor students’ ability to identify and use strategies to determine the rate at which new strategies should be introduced.

> Assist students to develop their metacognitive knowledge by explaining or eliciting: what the strategy is; why, how, when and where the strategy should be used; how to evaluate use of the strategy. (Adapted from Winograd and Hare 1988: cited in Carrell 1998: 10–11)

> Ask students to keep a diary of the strategies they use to read a range of different texts (this could be combined with a diary of extensive reading – see Suggestions for the classroom in Chapter 8). Have students keep a record of the reading strategies used to read each type of text; compare strategies used for different text types; discuss strategy use with other students in pairs or small groups.

WHAT RESEARCHERS say

On the basis of an awareness of different genres and of the relationship of different language features to different text types and contexts, the teaching of reading strategies can be so much more effective, with a more apparent connection between strategy, text type and reading purpose … these insights translate into classroom practices in which teachers are engaged in explicitly deconstructing texts for students, frequently making comparisons between texts and exploring their social purposes, and constantly connecting texts and reading strategies to social contexts. (Hood and Joyce 1995: 6)

Skilled readers don’t get that way overnight. They learn how to do this complex thing called reading by doing it repeatedly, over long periods of time, with lots of different texts, and with lots of opportunities to practise applying strategies, and monitoring their processes and evaluating the effectiveness of different reading strategies for themselves in different reading situations. Therefore, metacognitive reading strategy training should also be a long-term educational process, with constant attention and support over longer periods of time. (Carrell 1998: 17)
Practical examples

> Here are some examples of reading strategies that readers may use when reading for different purposes:
  - specify a purpose for reading
  - plan what to do/what steps to take
  - preview the text
  - predict the content of the text or section of text
  - check predictions
  - pose questions about the text
  - find answers to posed questions
  - connect text to background knowledge
  - summarise information
  - connect one part of the text to another
  - pay attention to text structure
  - reread all or parts of the text
  - guess the meaning of a new word from context
  - use discourse markers to see relationships
  - check comprehension
  - identify comprehension difficulties
  - take steps to repair faulty comprehension
  - critique the author
  - judge how well objectives were met
  - reflect on what has been learned from the text.

(Adapted from Grabe and Stoller 2002: 16)

> When working with beginning readers:
  - model the reading strategies that you use to read a text (eg skimming, scanning, sounding words out, guessing the meaning of words from context, rereading, reading in detail);
  - provide strong visual and contextual support to reading texts, selecting a variety of texts associated with a topic, and reading tasks that are context embedded and concrete rather than abstract;
  - build the context for the text through pictures, audiovisual material, excursions, and class discussion.

(Adapted from Grabe and Stoller 2002: 16)
If language teachers understand how whole texts make meaning in context, they are able to design language teaching programs aligned to the language that students need to use in real life. (Butt et al 2000: 246)

In the majority of EFL reading lessons the emphasis remains on comprehension of content and the development of strategies to allow more rapid and accurate processing of information. A genre-based approach to the teaching of reading can … facilitate a clearer appreciation of how the choices made at the level of lexico-grammar invariably reflect the writer’s purpose … and how the grammar is constructed to manipulate the reader into the desired reading position and response to the text. Such knowledge is often vital to unpacking and understanding a text. (Mackay 1995: 8)

Prior knowledge figures prominently in various versions of ‘reading’ … The use of texts about which learners have limited background knowledge can be a hindrance to comprehension. This would seem particularly significant in the case of ESL instruction, where learners bring varying bodies of cultural knowledge and competence to bear on the text. It also suggests the need for explicit and guided instructional introduction to those texts and genres that make meaning demands on students. (Freebody and Luke 1990: 10)

What Researchers Say

Reading for meaning

If students can use reading strategies, and understand the vocabulary, will they fully comprehend a text?

How can teachers help students to increase their understanding?

Findings

> From a social and functional point of view, language learning is a ‘process of learning how to make meaning in social contexts’ (Butt et al 2000: 258). Understanding the meaning of a text in context is therefore vital to language learners.

> To understand the meaning of a text in context, a reader needs to understand not only content (the meaning of the words and the meaning of the overall text), but also the socio-cultural context of the text and the writer’s purpose.

> The socio-cultural context of texts, and the ways that meaning is constructed within texts and shaped by the context are often not obvious to learners from different cultural backgrounds, who bring different cultural knowledge to their understanding of texts. The socio-cultural context of texts can be explored through various activities within a teaching and learning cycle (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 43).
Suggestions for the classroom

> Have students explore the social context of the text, including:
  > - features of the general cultural context in which the text is used (e.g., an argument, a recount, a narrative) and the social purposes the text achieves (e.g., to inform, to argue a point);
  > - the topic of the text (field): e.g., through excursions, guest speakers;
  > - the relationship between the writer and the reader (tenor): e.g., represent the reader–writer relationship in a diagram; and
  > - the form (spoken or written) of communication (mode): e.g., illustrate the distance in time and space between the reader and writer in a diagram.

> Use some of the following strategies to deconstruct the text:
  > - Establish social contexts that generate a genuine need to use the text (e.g., read an information text to plan a class excursion).
  > - Have students identify (or draw their attention to) language features that reveal the text’s structure, grammar, and vocabulary (e.g., through labelling activities, transparency overlays).
  > - Provide activities at the level of meaning, such as: sorting texts; sequencing jumbled texts; highlighting elements of text structure or texture; drawing visual representations of text structure.
  > - Provide activities at the level of grammar and vocabulary, including: sequencing jumbled words or groups; colour-coding parts of sentences; learning the forms and structures of words and groups; vocabulary building; pronunciation practice and spelling activities; cloze activities; multiple-choice questions; and grammar games.
  > - Provide opportunities to evaluate the text, to discuss who the intended audience is, to discuss how it might be improved or changed, and to determine the effect of the text on the reader.
  > - Have learners find other examples of the text type to compare the different language (e.g., vocabulary) choices made by writers when using the same text type.

(Adapted from Feez 1998; Butt et al 2000)

What researchers say

[A] text is a harmonious collection of meanings appropriate to its context. This unity of purpose gives a text both texture and structure. Texture comes from the way the meanings in the text fit coherently with each other [through grammatical and lexical cohesion] … Structure refers to the way that most pieces of language in use will contain certain obligatory structural elements appropriate to their purpose and context. … During explicit instruction … the teacher focuses students’ attention on the language of the text, explicitly and systematically showing learners how the meanings in the text are:
  > - shaped by the contexts in which they are used
  > - unified by texture and structure
  > - encoded in lexicogrammar.
(Butt et al 2000: 3, 264)

If there are particular work-, school- or leisure-related purposes which all your students need spoken or written English to accomplish, then the English course can be oriented towards achieving control of the relevant spoken and written genres. Students will need to gain a clear understanding of the nature and stages of the social process under attention and how it is like or unlike comparable social processes in their own culture. This will provide the learner with insights into the English-speaking culture and opportunities to reflect on or contest its assumptions as well as to gain confidence or experience in using the language patterns that are particularly foregrounded in the genre. In this way, students will gain choices about the extent to which they wish to operate in the ways of the new culture.
(Painter 2001: 172)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Encourage students to ask themselves some of the following questions when reading texts:
  - Where might you find this text? How can you tell this?
  - What is the topic?
  - What is the purpose of the text?
  - Who is it written for?
  - Who probably wrote it? What would their position be? In what institution?
  - Why was the text written? Are there any economic/material interests affecting the way it has been written?
  - How does the language of the text help to achieve its purpose? What words and phrases show the writer's feelings, attitudes and opinions?
  - Why is the grammar the way it is?
  - How is that linked to the writer's purpose?
  - What does the writer want to do to me, the reader?
  - What relationship is the writer attempting to construct with me?
  - Where is it located on the spoken-written continuum, and why?
  - What other ways of writing about the topic are there?

(Adapted from Mackay 1995:12; Reade 1998: 44; Rice 1998: 56)

> Ask questions that:
  - elicit and value students' own constructions of meaning, rather than imposing the teachers' understandings;
  - elicit and value students' responses;
  - focus students' attention on text structure and language use;
  - focus students' attention on the author's stance;
  - focus on text awareness, rather than 'test' for the right answer.

(Adapted from Wilson 2005)
Reading fluency

Why build reading fluency?
How can teachers help students to increase their reading fluency?

Findings

> One of the aims of building reading fluency is to consolidate the language that has already been learned.
> For students intending to go on to further study, the ability to read and comprehend large quantities of written material quickly is a vital skill.
> Around 25 per cent of learning time should be devoted to fluency development. This could be achieved if learners are taught skills to increase their reading fluency independently (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 49).
> In building reading fluency, it is important to balance reading rate and comprehension: sometimes rate may need to take priority over comprehension in order to develop automaticity in reading.
> Extensive reading can be used to develop reading fluency, if 99–100 per cent of the words in the text are known.
> Classroom experience has shown that readers comprehend a text better if they read it three times at a faster speed over 5 minutes, than if they read it once slowly over 5 minutes.
> Reading aloud (in small groups) has benefits for students’ use of reading strategies, pronunciation, vocabulary, confidence and motivation (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 49).

(Source: Anderson 1999; Given 2000; MacPhail 2000; Nation 2001)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Consider the complexity of texts used for fluency activities: for fluency, 99–100 per cent of the words in a text should be familiar (Nation 2001).

> Use a range of activities in class to build reading fluency:

*Timed (speed) reading*
- Provide texts of a fixed length for students to read individually.
- Set a time limit, and count the words read.
- Follow timed reading with comprehension questions.
- Use reading fluency charts to increase motivation, with time in minutes in ascending order in the left-hand column, and words per minute in descending order in the right-hand column.
- Make your own timed reading texts – count the words using the word count function on your word processor.

*Paced reading*
- Have all of the class read at a set pace. Set 100 words per minute for initial practice reading of a 400-word passage.
- At 60-second intervals make a sound to indicate to students that they should be at the next 100-word mark.
- Keep records, and adjust class rate according to student needs.

*Repeated reading*
- Have students reread texts (silently or aloud).
- Set up reading groups in or out of class time, where students read readers aloud to the group. Play a tape first (if available), while students follow the text. Correct pronunciation at the end of each paragraph. Encourage ‘dramatic readings’. Discuss vocabulary, events and issues raised, and follow up with a focus on grammar points (Given 2000: 36; MacPhail 2000: 43).

> Have learners develop their reading fluency outside class time:

- Create online timed reading exercises based on texts used in your program using *Hot Potatoes* or similar software.
- Direct students to existing online timed reading exercises (search for sites under ‘timed reading’ using a search engine).
- Encourage extensive reading (see Chapter 8).
What are the differences between extensive, intensive and narrow reading?

What are the benefits of each approach?

Findings

> Rather than favouring one approach over another, a language program should provide opportunities for extensive, intensive and narrow reading (see Suggestions for the classroom on page 53).

> For extensive reading for fluency development, 99–100 per cent of the words in the text should be known. For extensive reading for language growth, 95–98 per cent of the words should be known. For intensive reading, use texts in which less than 95 per cent of words are known.

> Extensive reading contributes to effective reading by: developing automatic word recognition; developing sight vocabulary; building student motivation; extending students’ general background knowledge; increasing reading comprehension; providing the opportunity to develop and maintain reading strategies; developing the ability to ‘read to learn’; and providing the means for students to continue learning a second language on their own.

> Narrow reading supports vocabulary development and extends background knowledge.

> Intensive reading contributes to language and vocabulary development, and the development of reading strategies.

(Sources: Grabe 1995; Nation 2000; Day and Bamford 2002)
Suggestions for the classroom

Incorporate extensive, intensive and narrow reading into a text-based approach:

- Build the field and recycle vocabulary by selecting a number of texts on the same topic, basing choices on students’ needs (narrow reading).
- Have students deconstruct the texts (intensive reading – see examples in Chapter 6).
- Encourage students to read texts of the same type, or on the same or a related topic, extensively out of class time – and to keep diary notes of their reading to discuss in pairs or small groups (extensive reading).

Support students’ extensive reading:

- Encourage students to read as much as possible (in and out of the classroom).
- Ensure that a variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available.
- Ensure that reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of students in terms of vocabulary and grammar.
- Orient students to the goals of extensive reading.

(Adapted from Day and Bamford 1998: 7–8)

> Explain the difference between extensive reading for language growth and extensive reading for fluency, and assist students to choose texts accordingly.

> Encourage students to read at least one reader per week, and at least three readers at each level (Nation 2000, 2003).

> Encourage students to keep a diary of their extensive reading (see Practical examples on page 55).

> Have students discuss what they have read in groups.

> Encourage students to recommend readers to each other, and to exchange readers.
Below is an example of a diary from a general English course. Students use it to keep a weekly record of the types of English texts they read each week. Examples include newspapers, magazines, novels, junk mail and instruction manuals. Students complete their diaries for homework, then discuss their diaries in pairs or small groups.

**General English extensive reading diary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thur</th>
<th>Fri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(Source: English Language Programs, NCELTR 2001)

> Burns (2003) suggests the following extension activities for reading diaries:

- Have a class discussion about which items were most liked and disliked, or how to get access to reading materials outside class.
- After sharing their diary entries, students can analyse, collate and present the information – for example, itemising the ‘top three’ and the ‘bottom three’ types of texts to read (have students develop their own criteria for ranking texts), or preparing a bar chart of all the texts read.
Classroom research

How can teachers research reading in their classrooms, and what can this research be used for?

How can students research their own reading practices, and what can this research be used for?

Findings

> A classroom research project lies within each of the issues raised in each chapter of this book. A key to successful classroom research is to ensure that the purpose and outcomes of the research are significant to you, your students and your program.

> Burns (1999: 35) describes the action research process as ‘a series of interrelated experiences involving the following phases: 1) exploring, 2) identifying, 3) planning, 4) collecting data, 5) analysing/reflecting, 6) hypothesising, 7) intervening, 8) observing, 9) reporting, 10) writing, 11) presenting’.

> Classroom-based, or action, research can be used to: examine and analyse teaching practices; evaluate aspects of reading (eg reading rate, skimming) in relation to different instructional techniques; find out how different instructional techniques affect students’ reading development; inform and evaluate the selection of reading texts; and determine the value of extensive reading.

> Researching their own reading practices can increase students’ motivation, confidence and independence.

> Classroom research has additional benefits for teachers related to personal and professional growth, self-awareness and insight, and benefits that stem from collaboration with others.

(Sources: Burns 1999; Grabe and Stoller 2002)
Suggestions for the classroom

> Plan to carry out research in your own classroom. Here are some examples of questions that could be posed as the basis for classroom research:

- Which reading strategies do students use to read different types of texts?
- How much extensive reading do students do in class and at home?
- What techniques do you use in class to assist students to learn new vocabulary?
- To what extent does timed reading practice contribute to students’ reading fluency?

> Ensure that any research you conduct is carried out in an ethical manner (see Burns 1999: 70 for a discussion of ethical considerations).

> Encourage students to research their own and others’ reading practices by finding answers to some of these questions (some of these questions appear in previous chapters):

- What kinds of texts do you read in L1 and L2?
- Why do you read them?
- What kinds of texts do you want to read in L2?
- Do you use the same reading strategies in L1 and L2?
- Which reading strategies do you use to read different types of texts?
- How fast do you read different types (or levels) of texts?
- How many words can you learn over a period of time using word cards?
- To what extent does the use of a vocabulary notebook assist you in learning new words?

> Use student research projects as an opportunity to focus on specific elements of language such as question forms.

> Use the outcomes of your own and student research to inform your program.
Bibliography

References


English Language Programs, NCELTR 2001. General English course materials. Sydney: NCELTR.

English Language Programs, NCELTR 2002. Academic writing course materials. Sydney: NCELTR.


Further reading


