

1. Definition of Reading

One of the most important skills for learning is reading. In fact, most of your class work will be based on reading assignments. You will read to learn about new information and ideas from studies, articles, reports, and so on. You will read to prepare for tests or to write papers. But, what is reading?

Reading is a cognitive process of decoding symbols to derive meaning from texts. According to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, reading “perceives a written text in order to understand its content. This can be done silently (silent reading) or loudly. The understanding that results is called reading comprehension.

2. Components of Reading

Reading consists of three essential components or stages:

- a) **Decoding:** It refers to the process of translating a printed word into a sound. Decoding skills include the ability to recognize the basic sounds and sound blends, called phonemes, that make up a word and to know what the word means, recognize it in context, and know whether or not it is being used correctly in a sentence. Without decoding skills, students would have difficulty in learning to read.
- b) **Comprehension:** It is defined as the level of understanding a text/message. This understanding comes from the interaction between words that are written and how they trigger knowledge outside the text/message. Comprehension relies on a mastery of decoding. One who struggles to decode find it difficult to understand and remember what has been read because his/her efforts to grasp individual words are so exhausting that s/he has very little mental energy left for understanding.
- c) **Retention:** It is the condition of retaining (keeping) something. It could be in the short term memory or the long term one. The ability to retain relies heavily on one’s decoding proficiency and ability to comprehend what is read.

3. The Purpose of Reading

Your teacher may tell you to read a chapter because the material will be covered on a test. Or you may read an article to do research for a paper. Knowing the reason you are reading can help you find a focus. Any of the following are possible purposes for reading:

- **Studying for a test:** That is probably the reason you think is most important for doing your reading, though it is not always the case. Yes, you need to read to learn and then test your knowledge, but this should not be the primary purpose for reading
- **Reading to comprehend an idea:** The main purpose in reading is to understand an idea or concept. So, keep that always in mind as you read. What is the main idea? What are you learning (reading) about?

- **Connecting ideas together:** All reading tells a story, and when you read, you not only need to understand the individual parts of the story but also see how that part connects to other parts. A good portion of learning is simply seeing how things are interconnected.
- **Learning more:** Sometimes, you read an overview of a topic or concept to get the big picture. Other times, you go into more depth and learn about a specific idea or concept. You may do this as part of your lesson or do it on your own. For example, you may read about the solar system, and then become interested in space travel or astronomy and pursue those topics on your own.
- **Reading to appreciate literature:** For many subjects, your reading assignments will be non-fiction. For other classes, you may read fiction, such as novels, poetry, or plays.
- **Reading for pleasure:** Many students love reading for their own personal pleasure. You may also love to read, and you may like a particular genre (science fiction, horror, romance, and so on) or a wide variety of styles and types of writing.

4. Reading Problems

Many of you may face different problems when reading a material. These traits are not the result of lack of ability, but of negative self-belief, inappropriate teaching methods, or a lack of understanding about how your eyes and brain work together to assimilate information.

a) Lack of concentration

There is often a lack of concentration on the material that you are reading. You get to the end of the paragraph, and find that you have no idea of what you just read. No matter how good your IQ or memory may be, if your mind is not on it, you are not going to understand what you are reading, and will not remember the information.

b) Regression

Regression is the re-reading that you do when your eyes make a mistake in following lines or words in a line. In some cases your eyes may skip back to the same line and in other cases you may find that you have missed a few lines because your eyes moved down too far. In any case, the result is that you have to readjust your focus and re-read material, thus slowing your reading speed.

c) Word-by-word reading

From the beginning of school, we have been taught to read one word at a time. You started at the beginning of the line, read each word one at a time until you reached the end of the line and so on. Chances are that you never change this way of reading and still read one word at a time. As a speed reader, you had better see words as groups rather than individual words, and you will learn to extract meaning from the groups of words that you see.

d) Pronouncing words as you read

This is the other problem that has probably stayed with you from the time that you were learning how to read. When you were first taught how to read, you probably were saying the words out loud as you read them. Your teacher taught you to read the word dog, for example, by pronouncing each one of the letters, d, then o, then g, and after that pronouncing the word dog itself out loud. When you progressed to reading

silently to yourself, you took this method that was taught to you and internalized it. This is known as *vocalization*.

e) Finger-pointing

Most people find that they are more comfortable having a guide to follow, especially their fingers. This makes their eyes far more relaxed and efficient because the eyes are designed to follow movement. However, fingers can be large and bulky and may obscure some important words or create shadows.

f) Lack of sufficient vocabulary

You may be among the many readers who are limited by their current vocabulary. This in turn limits your reading speed. When you come across an unfamiliar word, there is little choice, but to consult a dictionary. Many readers however just skip the word and continue reading, thus compromising their understanding of the material.

5. The Importance of Reading

Reading is one important way to improve your life in general and language skills in particular. How does reading help you?

- Reading is fundamental to function in today's society.
- Reading is a vital skill in finding a good job.
- Reading is important because it develops the mind as well as the imagination.
- Reading is fundamental in developing a good self image and the creative side of people.
- Good reading skills, especially in a phonics reading programme, improve spelling.
- Reading helps to expand your vocabulary.
- Reading is important to develop the writing skills.
- Reading can help you prepare for study in an English-speaking country.
- Reading is a good way to find out about new ideas, facts and experiences.