

## **An Introduction to Reading Skills**

### **I. The Fundamentals of reading**

#### **1. Definition**

A number of scholars have differently defined what reading is, but all agree that the role of the reader is active rather than passive. Rumelhart (1979) states that reading as a process involves the reader, the text, and the interaction between the reader and the text. The meaning is not lying in the text to be passively absorbed, but the reader actively interprets the text in order to figure out the meaning. Buck (1979) and Goodman (1984) believe that reading is the process of deriving meaning from written or printed symbols and is similar across languages and across contexts. Readers of all languages draw on similar processing strategies even when the writing systems are very different.

The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics defines reading as "perceiving a written text in order to understand its content." Reading is a complex cognitive process that requires an active interaction between the reader's mind (prior knowledge), the text, and the context, with the ultimate goal of comprehension.

Understanding a written text entails obtaining the necessary information from it as efficiently as possible. For example, we use different reading techniques while checking at a notice board to see whether there is an advertisement for a specific style of flat and when carefully reading a special interest article in a scientific magazine. However, locating the relevant advertisement on the board and comprehending the new information included in the article demonstrate that the reading objective in each case has been met.

#### **2. Components of Reading**

The main components of reading, known as the "Five Pillars," are Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension, which all work together to make meaning, however other models also add Oral Language or Writing. These abilities progress from understanding sounds (phonemic awareness) to connecting them to letters (phonics), reading smoothly (fluency), knowing word meanings (vocabulary), and finally comprehending the text's message.

This could be understood this way:

a) Turning a printed word into a sound. This includes the capacity to detect the basic sounds and sound combinations, called as phonemes, that make up a word, as well as understand what the word means, recognize it in context, and assess whether or not it is used correctly in a sentence. Without decoding skills, students would have difficulty learning to read.

b) Understanding stems from the interaction of written words and how they elicit information beyond the text/message. Decoding skills are required for comprehension. A person who struggles to decode finds it difficult to understand and retain what has been read since his/her efforts to grasp individual words are so tiring that s/he has very little mental energy available for understanding.

c) Retaining something. It could be in either short- or long-term memory. The ability to retain is greatly dependent on one's decoding proficiency and comprehension of what is read. It is the ability to recall the read material after a lapse of time.

\_\_\_ In addition to these components, there are two important objects:

Reading speed: it is the speed at which one can read words. It is calculated at the rate of words per minute.

Reading efficiency: it combines reading speed and reading comprehension. It is calculated at the rate of the two aspects mentioned.

### **What do we read?**

The main text-types one usually comes across are: Novels, short stories, tales; other literary texts and passages (e.g. essays, diaries, anecdotes, biographies), Newspapers and magazines (headlines, articles, editorials), Specialized articles, reports, reviews, essays, Handbooks, textbooks, guidebooks Recipes Advertisements, travel brochures, catalogues, Instructions (e.g. warnings), directions (e.g. How to use ... ), notices, rules and regulations, posters, signs (e.g. road signs), forms (e.g. application forms, landing cards), price lists, tickets. Statistics, diagrams, flow/ pie charts, time-tables, maps Telephone directories, dictionaries, phrasebooks.

### **Why do we read?**

There are two main reasons for reading:

-Reading for pleasure & Reading for information (in order to find out something or in order to do something with the information you get).

### **How do we read?**

The main ways of reading are as follows:

**Skimming:** quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it.

**Scanning:** quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.

**Extensive reading:** reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure. This is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding.

**Intensive reading:** reading shorter texts, to extract specific information. This is more an accuracy activity involving reading for detail.

These many methods of reading are not mutually exclusive. For example, one frequently skims a chapter to see what it is about before choosing whether it is worthwhile to read a specific paragraph or find the information one is seeking for, or one would skim a recipe Book To see if a recipe sounds like something you want to try (e.g., is it complex or simple?). The list of ingredients and the number of steps/sections (without reading the details).

### **3. 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 life.
- It helps develop the cognitive functions (memory, critical thinking, imagination ...)
- Good reading skills, especially in a phonics reading programme, improve spelling.
- Reading helps to expand your vocabulary and writing skills.
- Allows you to see the world from others' viewpoints, fostering empathy and understanding.
- Reading is a good way to find out about new ideas, facts and experiences.
- It promotes academic achievement and job performance by developing fundamental literacy.

#### 4. Basic skills for reading

Students will never read efficiently unless they can adapt their reading speed and technique to their aim when reading. There are two crucial skills we should adapt in any reading process:

Predicting: This is not really a technique but a skill which is basic to all the reading techniques practised in this part and to the process of reading generally. It is the faculty of predicting or guessing what is to come next, making use of grammatical, logical and cultural clues. This skill is at the core of techniques such as 'anticipation'.

Previewing: Unlike predicting, previewing is a very specific reading technique which involves using the table of contents, the appendix, the preface, the chapter and paragraph headings in order to find out where the required information is likely to be. It is particularly useful when skimming and scanning and as a study skill.

In this regard, three main stages are to be distinguished in this process:

**Before reading**: here you need to set a purpose and activate your prior knowledge. You generally try to preview titles/headings, predict content ...

**While reading**: in this interactive stage, you actively build meaning, monitor comprehension, adjust speed, identify main ideas, address unknown words ...

**After reading**: this an assessment stage where you consolidate and evaluate, review, recall key points, summarize, paraphrase, and apply the information where needed.

---

#### 5- Models of Reading

These models explain the cognitive processes which occur in the reader' mind while receiving the information:

Model	Focus	Direction	Connection to Strategy
Top-Down	Using prior knowledge, context, and expectations to help interpret the text.	↓ (Brain to Text)	Used in Skimming to predict the text's content.

Model	Focus	Direction	Connection to Strategy
Bottom-Up	Focus on decoding small units: letters, phonics, and individual words.	↑ (Text to Brain)	Used in Detailed Reading to ensure precision.
Interactive	A simultaneous blend of both processes, switching as needed.	↻ (Both Ways)	Used by expert readers for seamless adjustment.

## 6- Reading techniques

By reading all texts in the same way, students would waste time and fail to remember points of importance to them because they would absorb too much non-essential information. Active readers use reading strategies to help save time. These strategies are similar in process but different in based on the purpose for reading which determines which strategy or strategies to use. They are very rapid reading methods in which you glance at a passage to find specific information. These reading methods make it easier for you to grasp a large amount of material, especially when you are previewing. They are also useful when you don't need to know every word.

### A). Skimming (Getting the gist)

#### a. Definition:

Skimming is a highly selective process; it is a **rapid** reading technique used to **quickly** get the **main idea** or the **general overview** of a text. It involves reading quickly to understand the general sense without focusing on every word (like linking words: the, for, a ..). Think of it as quickly looking over a landscape to identify the major landmarks rather than inspecting every tree. Skimming is most useful when you need to decide if a text is relevant or if you just need the core message.

#### b. Types of texts we usually skim:

. Common examples of texts you would skim include:

- **Newspapers/Magazines:** Quickly reading headlines, subheadings, and lead paragraphs to grasp the day's events or the articles' main topics.

- **Business and Travel Brochures:** Looking through sections and bolded text to understand the service/destination's key features, prices, or itineraries.
- **Book Chapters:** Reviewing the introduction and conclusion to see what the chapter is about before committing to a full read.

### c. How to skim?

To effectively skim, focus on the following elements:

1. Read the title and subheadings because these immediately tell you the main topic and how it is broken down.
2. Look at visuals (Check captions, images, charts, and graphs for instant information.)
3. Read the introduction and conclusion because the introduction usually states the main thesis, and the conclusion summarizes the key findings.
4. Read the first sentence of each paragraph (Topic Sentence), because it contains the paragraph's main idea.
5. Look for key words: notice words in **bold** or *italics*, bullet points, dates, and names.
6. Skip the details like over examples, descriptive text, and complex arguments.

### Skimming Examples (Getting the gist)

<i>Text Type</i>	<i>Goal of Reading</i>	<i>What to Skim For</i>
<b>Newspaper Editorial</b>	To quickly understand the author's stance on a political issue.	The headline, the first and last paragraph (thesis and conclusion), and any strong adjectives or verbs.
<b>Email Inbox</b>	To decide which emails are urgent and which can wait.	The Sender, the Subject Line, and the first sentence of the email body.
<b>Academic Textbook</b>	To prepare for a class discussion on a chapter you haven't read fully.	The chapter title, section headings, table of contents, and any review questions at the end.

## **B) Scanning (Finding specific information)**

### **a. Definition**

Scanning is a rapid reading technique used to **locate a specific piece of information** within a text. Unlike skimming, where you seek the general meaning, scanning means you already know what you're looking for (**a name, a date, a number, a keyword**) and you let your eyes move quickly across the page until you find it. Scanning is essential when you need to extract isolated data points

### **b. Types of texts we usually scan:**

. Examples of texts you would scan include:

- **Flights/Train Time Tables:** looking for a specific departure time or flight number.
- **Google Search List:** quickly looking for the most relevant headline/description that contains your keywords.
- **A Graph or Chart:** searching for the label of a specific axis or the value of one particular data point.
- **A Bus Schedule:** locating the time the bus arrives at your specific stop.
- **A Conference Guide:** finding the room number or time for a specific speaker's session.

### **c. How to scan?**

For efficient scanning, follow these steps:

1. Identify the Key Word(s): determine the exact information you are looking for.
2. Visualize the Word: try to visualize the look of the word or number to help your brain recognize it instantly.
3. Use a Systematic Motion: move your eyes rapidly down the center of the column or page, or sweep horizontally across each line, depending on the text layout.
4. Stop and Check: as soon as your eyes catch the keyword, stop and read the surrounding text to confirm it's the specific information you need. Do not read the rest of the text.

\_\_\_\_\_ ***Scanning Examples (Finding specific information)***

Text Type	Specific Information Needed	What to Scan For
<b>Dictionary or Glossary</b>	The definition of the word <i>metaphor</i> .	The bolded letters 'M', then the entry for the word <i>metaphor</i> .
<b>Ingredient List on a Product</b>	To check if a food item contains peanuts (due to an allergy).	The word "Peanut," "Nut," or "Contains..." statement.
<b>Phone Book/Contact List</b>	The phone number of "Dr. Eleanor Vance."	The letter 'V' in the alphabetical list, then the first name 'Eleanor'.
<b>Index of a Book</b>	The page number where the concept of "Quantum Entanglement" is first discussed.	The term "Quantum Entanglement" in the index, then the page number next to it.

### C) Detailed Reading (Full comprehension)

#### a. Definition

Detailed Reading (also called intensive or close reading) is a slow, careful reading technique used to achieve full and deep comprehension of a text. The goal is to understand every detail, nuance, argument, and supporting evidence. This process often involves re-reading, note-taking, and critical analysis. Detailed reading is necessary when the information is critical, complex, or needs to be retained for application.

#### b. Types of texts we usually read carefully:

. Examples include:

**A Notice/Legal Contract:** every word is important for understanding your rights, obligations, or instructions.

**A Recipe:** exact measurements, specific order of steps, and cooking times are crucial for a successful outcome.

**Academic Textbooks or Research Papers:** you need to grasp the methodology, supporting data, and the author's full argument.

**Exam Questions:** every instruction and detail must be understood to provide the correct answer.

### 3. Detailed Reading Examples (full Comprehension)

Text Type	Goal of Reading	Reason for Detailed Reading
<b>A Lease or Rental Agreement</b>	To move into a new apartment.	You must understand all clauses, payment terms, and restrictions to avoid legal issues.
<b>Scientific Experiment Methodology</b>	To replicate the experiment in a lab.	The exact procedures, measurements, and materials must be followed precisely for valid results.
<b>Financial Report (e.g., Annual Report)</b>	To decide whether to invest in a company.	All numbers, footnotes, and risk disclosures must be carefully examined to assess financial health.
<b>Poetry</b>	To analyze the use of imagery and symbolism.	You need to read slowly, often re-reading, to appreciate the structure, meter, and deeper, hidden meanings.

---

#### Practice: Pulp Fiction

Imagine you are looking at a transcript of the movie *Pulp Fiction*.

- **Skimming:** You would **quickly** read the character names, scene headings, and maybe the first line of dialogue in each scene to confirm the **general** plot progression (e.g., Vincent and Jules, the diner, the briefcase).
- **Scanning:** If your friend asks, "What does Vincent Vega say right after Jules says, 'Say what again!'" you would **scan** the text solely for the phrase "Say what again!" to find the next line of dialogue.
- **Detailed Reading:** If you are writing a film studies paper on Quentin Tarantino's use of non-linear narrative, you would need to **read in detail** every line of dialogue, scene description, and structural cue to analyze the text's full complexity.

---

#### II. Communication Strategies (CS):

Communication Strategies are used to overcome linguistic problems or gaps when the exact word is unknown, ensuring the flow of meaning continues. They are methods a speaker or writer uses to overcome a problem or gap in communication, often when they lack the

University of Jijel  
Teachers High School

Reading Comprehension/Dr. Mohdeb

necessary linguistic resources (like vocabulary) to express themselves clearly and fluently.

They help maintain the flow of conversation or text comprehension.

Here are the key strategies:

#### **a) Approximation**

- **Definition:** Using a related but incorrect word to convey the intended meaning. This is often done when the precise term is forgotten or unknown. So, when reading, you might approximate the meaning of an unknown word based on its root or context, giving you an adequate, though not exact, understanding of the sentence.

*Example:* Saying "pipe" for a "faucet," or calling a "screwdriver" a "metal thing" that turns screws.

#### **b) Paraphrasing**

- **Definition:** Expressing the idea or meaning using other words instead of the missing target word. This involves providing a description or a general definition. Good readers naturally paraphrase complex sentences or concepts they are reading to ensure they understand the core meaning in simpler terms.

*Example:* Instead of saying "thermometer" (if the speaker can't recall it), they might say, "the glass tube that tells you how hot or cold it is."

#### **c) Invention (Coining)**

- **Definition:** Creating a new, non-existent word to represent the intended concept. This is a creative, though less common, strategy, relying on the listener's/reader's ability to guess the meaning from context or morphology. While not common in reading, a writer might intentionally invent a word (e.g., in literature or specialized jargon), requiring the reader to deduce its meaning from the surrounding text (a form of detailed reading).
- **Example:** A speaker might call an astronaut a "**space-man**" or say they need to "**hand-write**" a letter (a term created by analogy with "type-write").

#### **d) Mime / Gesture**

- **Definition:** Using physical actions like body language, hand movements, or facial expressions to convey a meaning that cannot be expressed verbally. While not directly used in reading text, a reader's comprehension of descriptive text (detailed reading) is

often enhanced by mentally or physically miming/gesturing the actions being described, aiding memory and visualization.

**Example:** Pointing to your watch and making a shrug to indicate that you don't know the time or using an **imitative action** to describe an object (e.g., pretending to pedal a bike).

### E) Appeal for Help

- **Definition:** Directly or indirectly asking for assistance from the listener/reader to provide the missing word or phrase. This strategy is mirrored in reading when the reader appeals for help by looking up a word in a dictionary, asking a teacher, or using an online search (scanning a glossary) to resolve a vocabulary gap.

**Example:** Saying, "What do you call... the place where you keep books?" or simply, "How do you say X in English?"

---

### First Test: Pulp Fiction

let's assume there is a sample text (a simplified scene description from *Pulp Fiction*) you would consult to demonstrate how you would apply these strategies.

#### SCENE 22: APARTMENT - MORNING

..... **Skimming Question:** What is the general subject of this scene?

*Answer (Skimming):* Two men are questioning a terrified man, Brett, about a briefcase they were supposed to receive for Marcellus Wallace.

..... **Scanning Question:** How much money does Jules claim is in the briefcase, and what is the color of Vincent's watch?

*Answer (Scanning):* \$20,000, and it is a **gold watch**.

.... **Detailed Reading Question:** Based on the dialogue, what is the meaning of *approximation* in this context?

*Answer (Detailed Reading):* Jules states, "We don't like approximation. We like things exact." Therefore, in this context, *approximation* means doing a job **imprecisely** or **incompletely** (i.e., not delivering the briefcase).

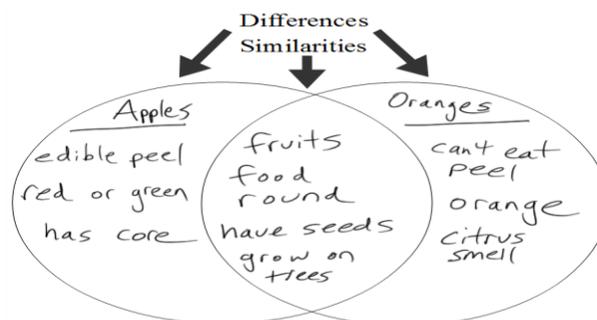
### III. Graphic and Semantic Organizers

Graphic organizers are visual tools that help you plan out, summarize, and comprehend the relationships between various bits of information in your text. They are usually utilized in the After Reading stage to organize what you have learned. They differ from usual methods to text representation.

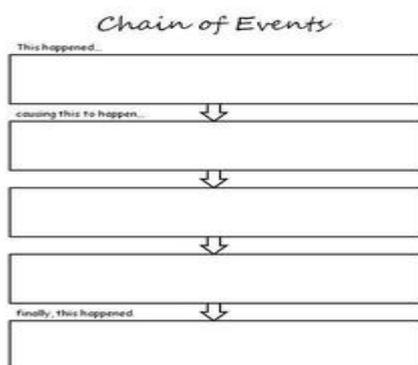
#### 1. Relational Organizers

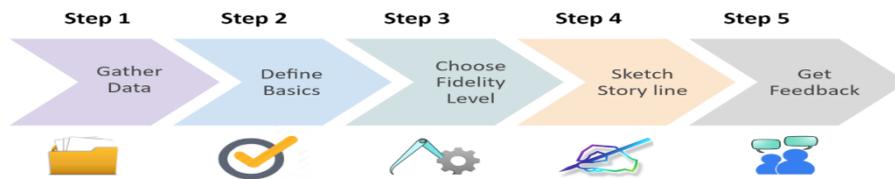
These help you compare ideas or track the movement of time.

- **Venn Diagram:** Two or more overlapping circles used to show similarities and differences. The overlapping part shows what they have in common, while the outer parts show what is unique to each.



- **Story Board / Chain of Events:** A series of boxes or panels connected by arrows. It is used to show the chronological order or a step-by-step sequence of events.

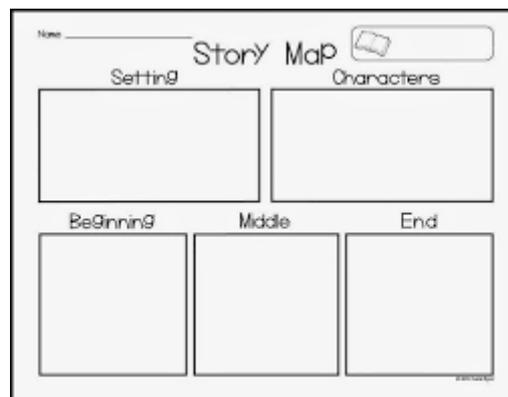




## 2. Narrative Organizers

These are designed specifically for stories (fiction or non-fiction narratives).

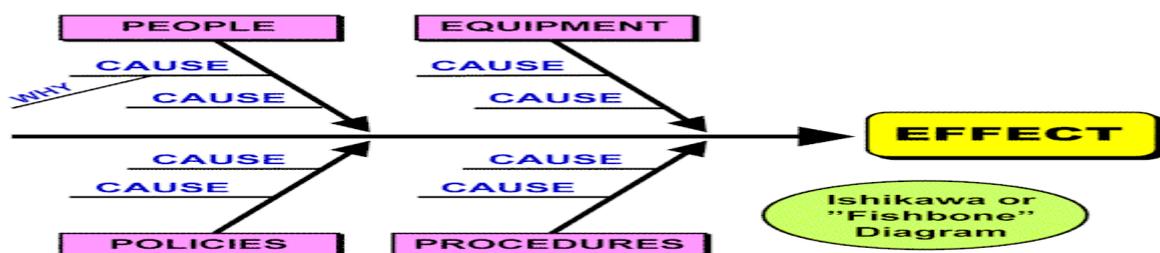
- **Story Map (Plot Diagram):** A diagram that tracks the structure of a story. It usually includes sections for: **Setting & Characters** (The beginning)/ **Conflict** (The problem)/ **Rising Action** (Events leading to the peak)/ **Climax** (The turning point)/ **Resolution** (How it ends)



## 3. Causal Organizers

These focus on logic and the "why" behind events.

- **Cause and Effect Map:** A visual that links an action (the cause) to its result (the effect). This can be a "Fishbone" diagram or a "Multi-flow" map. It is used to analyze consequences or historical reasons for an event.



- **Factors Affecting Reading Skills**

**Educational background:** This refers to the reader's previous education, literacy environment, and understanding of specific vocabulary. A reader's ability to switch from simple decoding to "interactive" processing is also determined by their educational background. A well-educated person may have a higher reading efficiency than those who are illiterate.

**Physical capability:** This refers to the biological and sensory functions needed to perceive and process text. Some people's physical limitations may impair their ability to read and comprehend. Vision Neurological Health, the physical ability to stay focused on a text without experiencing eye discomfort or tiredness.

**Mental Capability:** this encompasses cognitive functions like memory, attention span, and processing speed. A higher mental capability will lead to efficient reading and comprehension.

**Interest:** This is the reader's internal motivation and curiosity about a given topic. High interest can sometimes compensate for a lack of educational experience, since enthusiastic readers strive harder to master difficult terminology. He will read it faster, understand it better, and remember it for a longer period. Unlike when the material is boring.

**Practice:** This is the frequency and amount of reading that results in "fluency"—reading quickly, accurately, and correctly. The more a reader is regularly exposed to various text kinds (such as novels, scientific reports, or process descriptions), the more "automatic" their reading becomes.

---

↳ **Guidelines for a Better Text Comprehension**

**1- Monitoring Comprehension**

- Be aware of what you do understand
- Identify what you do not understand
- Use appropriate strategies to resolve problems in comprehension

**2- Metacognition**

- Identify where the difficulty occurs
- Identify what the difficulty is
- Restate the difficult sentence or passage in your own words
- Look back through the text

- Look forward in the text for information that might help you to resolve the difficulty

### **3- Answering Questions**

- Give yourself a purpose for reading
  - Think actively as you read
  - Monitor your comprehension
  - Review content and relate what you have learned to what you already know.
  - Identify or generate main ideas
  - Connect the main or central ideas
  - Eliminate unnecessary information
  - Remember what you read
-