

Introduction to Reading Skills

I. Course Syllabus: Reading Techniques 2

Level: First Year

Coefficient: 3

Weekly Volume: 1h30mn

Learning Objectives

- Transition from "classical" reading to a "technical" mode.
- Improve reading speed and efficiency.
- Master "intensive reading" to identify implicit meanings (reading between the lines).
- Develop critical thinking by questioning main ideas and identifying author assumptions.

-Whether you are attempting to go through a textbook or decipher a perplexing communication from a friend, these sorts of "reading" have quite distinct functions. One is about efficiency; the other is about perception. To move beyond surface reading, students must apply three specific layers of analysis:

- **Intensive Reading**: this is about focusing on every detail to ensure a complete understanding of the message. This involves a careful, thorough reading of a text, in which you underline or highlight words you do not know by looking them up or guessing their meaning. You might paraphrase difficult groups of words. When you come to the end, read the text again several times if necessary until you feel you really understand all of it.

Read this text and answer the questions which follow.

Scheduled and charter flights are almost indistinguishable in terms of seat comfort these days, at least for the Economy passenger. However, the check-in time is much shorter for a scheduled flight, and there is considerably less risk of delay, overbooking and other problems so often associated with the cheaper end of the market. Prices fluctuate according to season, time of day and whether you fly at the weekend or mid-week. Occasionally you can obtain a scheduled flight for the same price as a charter, but normally the price is a good deal higher. On the whole, scheduled flights are booked by business people and those who value reliability above economy, while charter flights are popular with package holidaymakers and individuals on a tight budget.

1 What do these words in the text mean?

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| A considerably | C fluctuate |
| B associated | D reliability |

2 Paraphrase these phrases.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| A are almost indistinguishable | C those who value reliability above economy |
| B the cheaper end of the market | D on a tight budget |

3 What is one advantage of a scheduled flight, according to the text? Answer in your own words.

Now look at these four alternatives and select the one closest to your answer.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| A less waiting around before take-off | C less dangerous |
| B better service by airline staff | D popular with tourists |

4 Choose the correct answer.

Scheduled flights are much better than charters

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A as they are cheaper. | C for people making economies. |
| B in terms of seat comfort. | D although they usually cost more. |

Which is/are the distractor(s) here?

- Mastering Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs)

The "Secret" to MCQs is to avoid looking at the options too early.

- Step 1: Read the text intensively before looking at any questions.
- Step 2: Read the question and formulate your own answer based *only* on the text.
- Step 3: Compare your mental answer to the provided alternatives.
- Step 4: Eliminate "distractors"—options that look correct but are logically flawed or not in the text.
- Step 5: Confirm the choice is either explicitly stated or clearly implied.

B Do the same with this text.

Although Brazil has its share of environmental and social problems, it has its successes too. One of these is the town of Curitiba, where the authorities, including the mayor, Jaime Lerner, have shown evidence of a strong vision and commitment to good environmental practice. In the shanty towns there are no flies or litter, because there is a voluntary recycling exchange system. A constant procession of women and children bring rubbish they have collected in bags or on wheelbarrows; for a kilo of litter they are given a kilo of potatoes and one of bananas. This means the streets stay clean, and people do not go hungry.

Public transport is also well organized. The buses are of the latest design, with platforms that open out at the same time as the doors, designed to allow a large number of passengers to board quickly. Tickets are bought beforehand to save time, and the bus travels fast on its own dedicated bus lane. Many motorists now leave their cars at home and take the bus to work, to cut costs and reduce traffic. The people of Curitiba are all involved in protecting their environment.

1 What do these words or phrases in the text mean?

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| A shanty town | C voluntary |
| B litter | D to board |

2 Paraphrase these phrases.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| A have shown evidence of | C a constant procession |
| B commitment to good environmental practice | D a dedicated bus lane |

3 Who has/have set up this environmental initiative in Curitiba?

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| A the mayor, Jaime Lerner | C motorists |
| B the people of Curitiba | D the town council or local government |

4 How does the recycling exchange work?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| A Rubbish is paid for. | C Rubbish is exchanged for food. |
| B Rubbish is sorted and recycled. | D People get rid of their own rubbish. |

5 How do the buses avoid getting stuck in traffic jams?

- | | |
|--|---|
| A They are of up-to-date design. | C People do not pay their fares on the bus. |
| B Other vehicles are not allowed to use bus lanes. | D Drivers respect and give way to them. |

- **Reading between the lines:** This is a metaphorical expression; it does not refer to the physical act of looking at the white space on a page. Sometimes you are not only required to answer questions based on your understanding of the gist and the details of a text, but also to deduce meaning from the context. The answer you want may not be stated in black and white, but will be implicit in the text. Finding this is known as reading between the lines.

As you read a text, ask yourself, 'How does the writer feel? What is the atmosphere like? What would I do in this situation?' These are the kinds of questions which need a careful reading of the text and an understanding of its cultural, social and emotional background.

(Inference: Analyzing the writer's feelings, situation, and underlying themes.)

How it works: you look for clues in word choice, punctuation, or what is omitted.

Why it matters: it is essential for understanding themes and symbolism in books, and situations where people are not being direct.

Read these paragraphs and answer the questions.

At first glance the village looked just the same, but then he realized the pond had been grassed over, and there was a car park where the cricket ground had been. He stood looking at the rows of shiny new cars on the asphalt where runs had been scored and matches won and lost. It seemed a waste, somehow.

- 1 Had he been there before?
- 2 Did he prefer it in the past or the present?

Moira's room was on the second floor. There was no heating, and the wind blew under the door and down the chimney in wild, violent gusts. Moira shivered. Would tonight be one of the nights? Would the long-dead Baron make one of his regular appearances? Would he come to claim her as victim number 3? She held her breath and listened. There was a scratching kind of noise outside her door.

- 3 What do you think has happened so far in the story?
- 4 Why do you think Moira shivers?

Carole sighed as she put the letter back in the envelope. She knew they would have to go, although John probably wouldn't be keen. He was very busy these days, with his new responsibilities, and looked so tired most of the time. What a pity Edinburgh was so far away, a long way to drive on your own, and anyway her boss certainly wouldn't let her take the time off at the moment. Perhaps later, when the summer rush was over ... She looked at the silver-framed photo on the piano, and smiled reassuringly at the white-haired old lady who was staring out at her. 'It's all right,' she whispered. 'I'll arrange it somehow. We'll be there.'

- 5 Where is Carole planning to go, and who is she going to visit?
- 6 What can you find out about the relationship between John and Carole?
- 7 Which adjectives from the box best describe a) Carole b) John c) neither of them?

worried	hard-working	enthusiastic
careful	caring	exhausted

- **Speed reading:** this is a series of physical and cognitive approaches meant to boost your reading rate without considerably affecting understanding. Most adults read at about **200–250 words per minute (wpm)**. Speed readers aim for **400–700+ wpm** (approximately).

If you have a long text to skim or scan, you may need to read it fast in order to answer the questions in the allotted time. Here are some ways of improving **the speed of your reading**

- Do not read each word. You have not got time for this.
- Look at each paragraph, and let your eye travel quickly over it, picking out important words like nouns, verbs, names, dates etc.
- Split the text into **groups of words**, and let your eye travel from one group to another, helped by the linking words.
- Read as much as you can (newspapers, magazines, short stories), just for the **gist**, without paying attention to style, grammar or vocabulary.
- **Time yourself** when reading. How long do you take to read a paragraph, or a page of closely typed print? Aim to reduce the time it takes you to read a particular text.

Other Techniques:

Eliminating Subvocalization: This is the habit of "sounding out" words in your head. Silencing that inner voice allows your brain to process images of words faster than the speed of speech.

Chunking: Instead of looking at every individual word, you train your eyes to take in 3–5 words at a single glance.

The Pointer Method: Using a finger or a pen to guide your eyes helps maintain focus and prevents "regression" (reading the same sentence twice).

- A** Look quickly at this text **for one minute only**. Then cover up the text and write down every word you can remember. You should remember at least some of the words in bold, which will give you the gist of the passage.

Despite the **traffic** which can be **extremely heavy** at times, **Athens** is a most **attractive capital city**, as **tourists** have **discovered** over the years. One of the most **appealing areas** is the **Plaka**, where **picturesque tavernas** rub shoulders with **souvenir shops**, in a patchwork of **nineteenth-century buildings, lanes and squares**. Several **fascinating museums** are housed in **beautifully restored mansions ...**

- B** Now look at the following text. Which do you think are the most important words for understanding the meaning? Underline, circle or highlight them. You can take your time over this.

Are you a chocoholic? If so, you would probably have felt at home in the ancient Mayan civilisation in Central America. In this sophisticated culture, noted for its outstanding achievements in architecture, astronomy, chronology, painting and pottery, chocolate played a central role, appreciated as a drink and used as a form of currency. Chocolate, which comes from the cacao bean, has been around for at least three thousand years, and has been consumed as a drink for most of that time.

- C** First read these questions. Then read the text which follows **for three minutes only**, and answer the questions, using short answers.

- 1 Which country do the islands belong to?
- 2 What is the food like on Hayman Island?
- 3 Where did Captain Cook land in 1770?
- 4 Which is the southernmost island, according to the text?
- 5 Where would you go for a *quiet* holiday?
- 6 Which island would you visit for diving?
- 7 Where is the largest sandy beach in the world, according to the text?

- Dealing with gapped texts

- Read the title if there is one, and skim the text for gist.
- When you know what it is about, read it again more carefully, and jot down a word or phrase that might help to fill the gap.
- Next, read the clauses, sentences, or paragraphs, and see whether any of them include the word, phrase, or idea that you wrote down.
- If they do, you may have found your answers.
- Remember they must make grammatical sense in the text.

► Do the same with this text.

I first became interested in classical music when my parents took me to a concert in Vienna.

(1) _____ (*how old?*) I can still remember the bright lights, and the beautifully dressed people, and the excitement, and the wonderful, wonderful music. (2) _____ (*connection between then and now?*) I even enjoy practising scales!

A Since then I've learnt to play three instruments.

B I suppose I must have been about four.

C I managed to get hold of a free ticket.

► Read this text and choose from sentences A-C the one which fits each gap (1 and 2). Use the clues in brackets to help you. There is one extra sentence.

For most people it is a relatively simple task to buy bunches of fresh herbs from their local supermarket. (1) _____ (*grow them yourself?*)

You can then cut the herbs whenever you want, and add tarragon, chives and marjoram to your soups and casseroles. (2) _____ (*better taste?*)

Just sit back and enjoy the compliments you will receive from your family and friends!

A They will transform the taste of your cooking, and add useful vitamins to your family's diet.

B Occasionally greengrocers can offer higher quality and lower prices.

C Even easier, however, is sowing the seed in pots to keep on your kitchen window-sill.

-Intonation & Stress in Reading

In phonetics and linguistics, intonation and stress are referred to as "suprasegmentals." They are the musical elements of speech that lay on top of particular sounds and alter the meaning of a sentence. When reading aloud, mastering these skills allows you to transition from mechanical production to natural, expressive communication.

Word stress is the emphasis placed on a specific syllable within a word. In English, stressed syllables are usually longer, louder, and higher in pitch. Many English words change their grammatical category based entirely on stress.

RE-cord (Noun: a physical disc) vs. re-**CORD** (Verb: to store sound).

OB-ject (Noun: a thing) vs. ob-**JECT** (Verb: to disagree).

...**Sentence stress** is flexible, whereas word stress is fixed. It identifies which word in a sentence is most significant. Typically, we emphasize content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives ...etc) and reduce the vowel sound in function words (prepositions, articles ...etc).

Notice how the meaning of this sentence changes depending on which word you stress:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| { | I didn't say she stole my money. (<i>Someone else said it.</i>) | } |
| | I DIDN'T say she stole my money. (<i>Strong denial.</i>) | |
| | I didn't say SHE stole my money. (<i>I suggested someone else stole it.</i>) | |

Intonation refers to the shifts in pitch when speaking. It works as "vocal punctuation," informing the listener if a sentence is a statement, a question, or an incomplete thinking.

Common Pitch Patterns:

- ➔ **Falling intonation** \ : Used for definitive statements, commands, and "Wh-" questions (Who, What, Where). It signals finality, completion, and confidence.
- ➔ **Rising intonation** / : Used for Yes/No questions, requests, and alternative questions. It is continuative and non-definitive.
- ➔ **Fall-Rise intonation** \ / : Often used for "reading between the lines." It suggests there is more to be said or indicates a polite hesitation signaling limited agreement or response with reservation.
- ➔ **Rise-Fall intonation** / \ : this tone is used for expressing strong feelings of approval, disbelief, surprise ...etc.

Why this matters for Reading?

As discussed with "reading between the lines," the most critical information in a text is often not in the words themselves, but in how they are meant to be emphasized. When you read a text, your brain needs to "hear" certain patterns in order to understand the structure. When we read, our brains conduct a "silent rehearsal" of the text. If we are unable to mentally assign the appropriate rhythm, the meaning is frequently confused.

- ➔ Read the text aloud. Focus on where you would naturally place **sentence stress** and where your **intonation** should rise or fall to make the meaning clear.

"The committee's decision to implement the new feedback protocol was, to put it mildly, unexpected. While the official report cited 'increased efficiency' and 'technological integration' as the primary drivers, the atmosphere in the faculty lounge suggested a different narrative. Several senior lecturers were seen huddled in the corner, their hushed tones and sharp gestures speaking louder than any memo. It wasn't just about the software; it was about who held the power to define 'quality' in student work."