

Reading Skills Through Active Reading Techniques

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Abstract: The aim of this article, thus, is to outline about reasons for using reading texts in class, kinds of reading texts that are suitable for English language students, types of written language, types of classroom reading performance and examples of reading materials.

Key phrases: Reading performance; written language; reading materials; intensive or close reading; extensive reading; skimming; scanning; to extract specific information; communicative tasks; general understanding; detailed comprehension;

Having discussed the term “reading” and stages of teaching reading we have understood that reading is complex process to organize and teach. In order to engage whole class to the lesson it is demanded from the teacher to choose correct and effective way of teaching, create the atmosphere of surveying, questioning, involving to the text completely and actively. One of the basic tools of teaching reading skillfully is active reading process including a great number of techniques to get involved in the lesson.

Active reading takes place when students are proactively involved in the reading of a text. Active reading is about more than reading words in black and white and answering questions afterwards. Student engagement is important in order to optimize learning, so when you, as the teacher, get your students involved in what they are reading, they are more likely to better understand the meaning within the text.

Active reading simply means reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate it for its relevance to your needs. Simply reading and re-reading the material isn't an effective way to understand and learn. Actively and critically engaging with the content can save your time. Most of study books and websites include in-text questions and self-assessed questions. It is an effective way of teaching reading using these as built-in cues to make learning active.

Reasons for using reading texts in class. There are many reasons why getting students to read English texts is an important part of the teacher's job. In the first place, many of them want to be able to read texts in English either for their careers, for study purposes, or simply for pleasure. Anything we can do to make reading easier for them must be a good idea.

Reading is useful for other purposes too. Any exposure to English is a good thing for language students. At the very least, some of the language sticks in their minds as part of the process of language acquisition, and, if the reading text is especially interesting and engaging, acquisition is likely to be even more successful. Texts for reading also provide good models for English writing. When we teach the skill of writing, we will need to show students models of what we are encouraging them to do.

Reading texts also provide opportunities to study language through vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and texts. Lastly, good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, excite imaginative responses and be a springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons.

Kinds of reading texts that are suitable for English language students. There has been frequent discussion about what kinds of reading texts are suitable for English language students. The greatest controversy has centered on whether the texts should be ‘authentic’ or not. That is because people have worried about more traditional language-teaching materials which tended to look artificial and to use over-simplified language which any native speaker would find comical and atypical.

However, if you give low-level students a copy of The New York Times or The Guardian (which are certainly authentic for native speakers), they will probably not be able to understand them at all. There will be far too many words they have never seen before, the grammar will be difficult, and the style will finish them off. A balance has to be struck between real English on the one hand and the students' capabilities and interests on the other. There is some authentic written material which beginner students can understand to some degree: menus, timetables, signs and basic instructions, for example, and, where appropriate, we can

use these. But for longer prose, we may want to offer our students texts which, while being like English, are nevertheless written or adapted especially for their level. The important thing is that such texts should be as much like real English as possible. The topics and types of reading text are worth considering too. Should our students always read factual encyclopedia-type texts or should we expose them to novels and short stories? Should they only read timetables and menus or can we offer them business letters and newspapers articles?

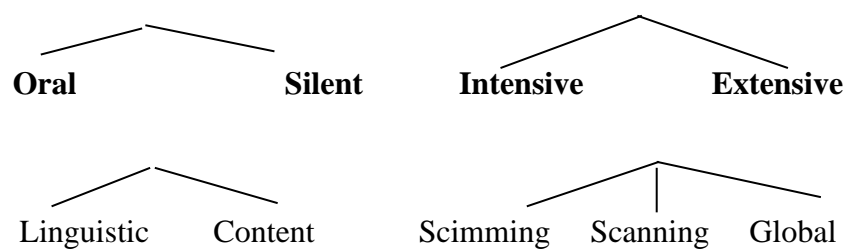
A lot will depend on who the students are. If they are all business people, the teacher may well want to concentrate on business texts. If they are science students, reading scientific texts may be a priority. But if, as is often the case, they are a mixed group with differing interests and careers, a more varied diet is appropriate. Among the things the teacher might want them to read are magazine articles, letters, stories, menus, advertisements, reports, play extracts, instructions, recipes, poems, and reference material.

Types of Written Language. In our highly literate society, there are hundreds of different types of written text, much more of a variety than found in spoken texts. Each of the types listed below represents a genre of written language. Each has certain rules of conversation for its manifestation, and we are thus able immediately to identify a genre and to know what to look for within the text. Consider the following list:

- ✓ non-fiction (reports, editorials, articles, dictionaries, and encyclopedias);
- ✓ fiction (novels, short stories, jokes, drama, and poetry);
- ✓ letters (personal and business), greeting cards, directories (e.g., telephone);
- ✓ diaries, journals, memos, messages (e.g., phone messages);
- ✓ announcements, forms, applications, invitations;
- ✓ questionnaires, directions, maps, labels, signs, recipes;
- ✓ academic writing (short answer test responses, essays, papers, theses and books);
- ✓ bills (and other financial statements), menus;
- ✓ manuals, schedules (e.g., transportation information);
- ✓ advertisements (commercial and personal), comic strips, cartoons;

Every literate adult knows what the distinctive features of each of these genres are. You can immediately distinguish a menu from a map, an interoffice memo from a telephone message, and a bill from an invitation. When you encounter one of the above, you usually know what your purpose in reading is, and therefore you know what to select and what not to select for short and long-term memory. Part of your job as a teacher is to enlighten your students on features of these genres and to help them to develop strategies for extracting necessary meaning from each.

Types of Classroom Reading Performance. Consider the following chart:
Classroom reading performance



Occasionally, you will have reason to ask a student to read orally. At the beginning and intermediate levels, oral reading can:

- ❖ Serve as an evaluative check.
- ❖ Serve as a pronunciation check.
- ❖ Serve to add some extra student participation if you want to highlight a certain short segment of a reading passage.

For advanced levels, usually only the latter advantage can be gained by oral reading. As a rule of thumb, you want to use oral reading to serve these three purposes because the disadvantages of too much oral reading can easily come into play:

- Oral reading is not a very authentic language activity.
- While one student is reading, others can easily lose attention (or be silently rehearsing the next paragraph!).

- It may have the outward appearance of “student participation” when in reality it is mere recitation.

Silent reading may be subcategorized into intensive and extensive reading. Intensive reading is usually a classroom-oriented activity in which students focus on the linguistic or semantic details of a passage. Intensive reading calls students’ attention to grammatical forms, discourse markers, and other surface structure details for the purpose of understanding literal meaning, implications, and the like.

Extensive reading is carried out to achieve a general understanding of a text. All pleasure reading is extensive. Technical, scientific, and professional reading can (and should) also be extensive. The latter, especially, sometimes involves skimming and scanning as strategies for gaining the general sense of a text. At other times, perhaps after students have done some pre-reading activity, skimmed for the gist, and scanned for some key details, extensive reading is quite simply a relatively rapid and efficient process of reading a text for global or general meaning.

Examples of Reading Materials. Before looking at examples of reading material, we will make some general comments about reading in the classroom. Reading is an exercise dominated by the eyes and the brain. The eyes receive messages and the brain then has to work out the significance of these messages. A reading text moves at the speed of the reader. In other words, it is up to the reader to decide how fast he or she wants to (or can) read a text, whereas listeners often have to do their best with a text whose speed is chosen by the speaker. The fact that reading texts are stationary is clearly a huge advantage.

It is often difficult to convince students of English as a foreign language that texts in English can be understood even though there are words and grammar a student has never seen before. But this is the case, not only for non-native speakers, but also for some speakers of English as a first language. Skills such as extracting specific information can be performed even though students do not understand the whole text; the same is true for students who want to get the “general idea” of a text. It is vitally important to train students in these skills since they really need them in real life.

The reading text is static. And students are often tempted to read slowly, worrying about the meaning of each particular word. And yet if they do this they will never achieve the ability to read texts in English. They will continue to have difficulty in quickly scanning or skimming unless the teacher insists on these skills. In other words, the teacher should insist on the comprehension task being performed in a limited amount of time. If this is regularly done, the teacher will find the amount of limited time necessary becoming less and less. First, we will look at reading to confirm expectations.

Reading to extract specific information (scanning type of reading). We will look at some examples in which students are asked to read a text to extract specific information. A vital feature of this skill is that students should see the questions or tasks they are going to answer or perform before reading the text. If they do this, it will be possible for them to read in the required way; they should scan the text only to extract the information which the questions demand. They do not have to worry about parts of the text they have difficulty with. We will now look at the example of yes / no questions. In this text, designed for elementary classes, students read about the cruise liner the QE2.

For the lead-in stage, the teacher and students discuss different types of vacations. The teacher then tells the students that they are going to read a text about the QE2, one of the most luxurious liners in the world. The students are asked to read the eight yes/no questions – only the questions. They are then told to read the text as fast as they can in order to answer those questions. They do not have to understand every word. The objective is only to find the answers to the questions, and they should do this as quickly as possible.

Look at the following example. Read these questions. Then read the passage to find out whether your answer is “Yes” or “No”.

1. Is the ship in the picture small?
2. Are there many ships like the QE2?
3. Do most people prefer to travel by sea?
4. Is the QE2 expensive?
5. Can the ship carry 2,950 people?
6. Can the passengers swim on the ship?

The QE2

The ship Queen Elizabeth II is usually called the QE2 now. It is a large, modern passenger ship. There are not many ships like the QE2 now. Most people prefer to travel by air and not by sea. The QE2 is very slow and expensive compared with a modern jet plane. But some people do not like to travel by plane, and the QE2 is..... well, different. The ship is really an enormous floating hotel, almost a small floating town. The five-day voyage from Southampton, England to New York is real holiday. The QE2 can carry 2000 passengers and it has a staff of 950 running the ship and looking after the passengers. The ship has three restaurants, eight bars, a ladies' hairdresser's and men's barber's shop. In addition, there are four swimming pools, two cinemas (they show many films for adults but there are some films for children, too), a casino, two libraries, a hospital, a bank, and a gymnasium.

When the students have finished answering the questions they can check their answers with each other. The teacher then conducts feedback, finding out how well they did and explaining any misunderstandings. It might be sensible to find out how many students got how many answers correct and which ones these were.

As a text-related task students are told that they are themselves taking a cruise on the QE2 and they should write a postcard to a friend. The students and the teacher might discuss the kind of things they could say in such a postcard. After students have written their cards, the more interesting ones can be read out to the class or circulated among the students.

Reading for Communicative Tasks (Skimming Type of Reading). We will look at two examples in which the reading of a text is designed to foster a communicative interaction of some kind. A popular reading technique is the reassembling of a text that has become disordered. In solving the puzzle students will be working in a rather different way: the process of reading – the process of solving the puzzle – becomes an end in itself.

Understanding the content of the text is not the only use of reading materials. Understanding linguistics is also very important. Students are supposed to know how texts are constructed, what language is used to give examples or make generalizations, etc. It is also important for students to understand the way in which texts are structured (paragraphs) and to recognize the writing functions.

In summary after completing this article, you should be able to: explain why getting students to read texts in English is an important part of the teacher's job, to name kinds of reading texts that are suitable for English language students, to name types of written texts, to name and describe types of classroom reading performance, to give examples of reading materials and to design your own reading exercises.

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