

TEACHING READING

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Abstract: *I will try to answer three questions: 1) What is efficient reading? 2) What is the rationale for efficient reading? 3) How can we teach efficient reading?*

Key words: *scanning, skimming, word-attack skills, inference.*

What is reading? It includes reading and understanding newspapers and magazines letters, business correspondence, official documents, stories, academic textbooks and scientific technical reports.

Flexibility in reading includes flexibility in speed as well as comprehension.

According to Fry, educated native speakers of English read at three speeds, depending on their purpose, the difficulty of the material, and their background knowledge. The first type of speed is Study Speed (200-300 words/minutes). This is the slowest speed used for reading text books and difficult materials such as legal documents, when the reader desires a high rate of understanding (80-90% comprehension) as well as good retention. In this type of reading the reader studies the material carefully in order not to miss a single point.

The second type of speed is average reading speed (250-300 word/minutes). This is the speed that educated native speakers use to read every day materials such as newspapers, magazines, novels and stories. At this speed the rate of comprehension is lowered (usually about 70 %). This is the fastest speed that native speakers use when they wish to cover the material in a hurry and high comprehension is not required. The skimming speed of educated native speaker is twice as fast as their average reading speed. Some of them can skim more than 800 word / minute. At this speed they accept a much lower comprehension (50 % on average).

An efficient reader can not only read slowly with good comprehension, but can also read fast with needed comprehension when circumstances require. The major objective of a reading course should be to improve the average and skimming speeds of our students, and to help them cultivate the ability to vary their speed in reading different materials for different purposes. Reading processes are cycles of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming.

Two types of information are necessary in reading visual information (which we get from the printed page) and non-visual information (which includes our understanding of the relevant language, our familiarity with the subject matter, our general ability in reading and our knowledge of the world). The more non-visual information we have when we read, the less visual information we need and vice-versa.

The psycholinguistic models of reading can be summarized as the following process:

- The reader approaches a text with expectations based on his knowledge of the subject;
- He uses only minimal sampling of the text in deriving meaning by relying on his knowledge of the language and the subject as well as his background knowledge, as a substitute for all the redundant features of the text;
- On the basis of sampling he makes predictions as to what message he expects to get from the text;

- As he progresses into the material, he tests his predictions, confirming or revising them, and makes still more predictions on the basis of what he has been reading. By making use of minimal orthographic, syntactic, and semantic clues in the material, he internally re-creates a replica of the textual message;
- Once such reconstruction has taken place he will test its accuracy against previous information, which includes the information extracted from the text, as well as the store of information in his long-term memory relevant to the topic;
- If the reconstruction is in agreement with his previous knowledge, the cycle of sampling begins again. If inconsistency or inaccuracy occurs he will adopt some compensatory strategy as re-reading.

According to the psycholinguistic models of reading, efficient reading is possible because the fluent reader does not read letter by letter nor word by word, but in meaningful units.

By looking at a sample of the text, he can predict the meaning of a larger part of it, based on what he has sampled and on his prior knowledge of the subject at hand.

He then looks at another part of the text to confirm his prediction. The efficient reader is one who guesses correctly with minimum sampling.

Efficient reading depends on the interaction among three factors: higher-level conceptual abilities, background knowledge and process strategies. Conceptual abilities refer to intellectual capacity such as the ability to analyze, synthesize, and infer. Background knowledge includes socio-cultural knowledge of the English speaking communities. Process strategies refer to the abilities and skills to reconstruct the meaning of the text through sampling based on syntactic information, lexical meaning, contextual meaning, and cognitive strategies. As students become more fluent readers, they move from the more concrete process strategies to the more abstract ones because the more abstract language systems such as syntax and semantics signal meaning. The ability to shift from more

concrete to more abstract strategies indicates maturation in reading. Coady's model shows that it is possible for students to become efficient readers by bringing the three factors into interaction through training.

The first thing for the teacher to do is to find out the weaknesses or problems of the students. Through tests and observation I have found that students have the following problems:

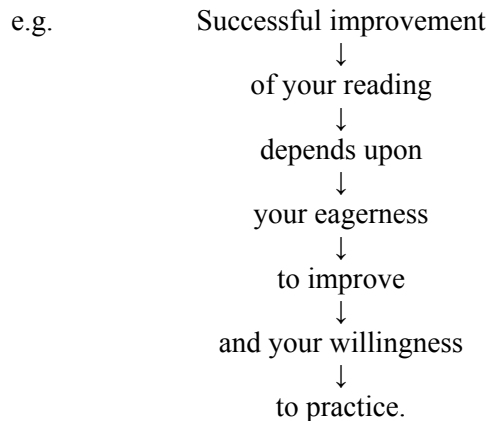
- Reading word by word, relying too heavily on their visual information which impedes their reading speed and hampers their comprehension;
- Focusing too much on form at the expense of meaning;
- Paying too much attention to details often missing the main ideas;
- Having a small reading vocabulary and heavy reliance on the use of the dictionary for word meaning;
- Limited background knowledge.

The task of the teacher is to help students change their reading habits by teaching them efficient reading skills. An effective way to do this is through guided reading which refers to timed reading conducted in class under the control of the teacher. I describe below how I teach some of the skills through guided reading:

1. Word attack skills: These skills enable the reader to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases without looking them up in the dictionary. Here are two useful word attack skills: using context clues: this includes using the meanings of other words such as synonyms and antonyms in the same sentence or paragraph, as a whole, to deduce the possible meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases. For example out of tree trunks by using an adze, the meaning of the word adze can be deduced from the meaning of the whole sentence. It must be a kind of instrument for cutting, something like an ax.

2. Reading in meaningful units: one of the factors that determine reading speed and comprehension is the number of words the eyes can see at one glance the greater will be their reading speed and the better will be their comprehension. Students should be able to

read in meaningful units instead of isolated words. A useful way to train students to read in meaningful units is to break up a sentence into sense groups and have students focus their eyes on the middle of each sense group arranged in separate lines and try to see words on each side of the line:



3. Scanning: This is a useful skill to locate a specific item (1) of information that we need, such as a date, a figure or a name. In scanning we focus our search only on the information we want, passing quickly over all the irrelevant information. The key to scanning is to decide what kind of information we are looking for and where to find it. A useful way to teach this skill is to have students search for some specific information such as a definition, or the name of a person or a place asking them to start at the same time and see who the first to find it is.

4. Skimming: This is the technique we use to determine if a book or an article deserves a more careful reading. In skimming what we are trying to get is the general idea of the whole text.

The key to skimming is where to find the main ideas of paragraphs and to be able to synthesize by way of generalization. Since the main idea of a well-organized paragraph is either in the first or the last sentence and the general idea of the text is in the introductory or concluding paragraph, the best way to teach skimming is to ask students to read the first and the last paragraphs in full, and the first and the last sentences of the paragraphs in between and pick up the key words such as dates, figures, names while moving their eyes down the page.

5. Prediction: Efficient reading depends on making correct predictions with minimal sampling. This ability will greatly reduce our reliance on visual information and enhance our speed and comprehension. Students can learn to make predictions based on the title, subtitles and their knowledge of the topic, the linguistic context, and the non-linguistic context such as diagrams, graphs, tables, pictures, or maps.

6. Recognizing organizational patterns: The logical structure of a passage is signaled by textual connectors, which are expressions connecting ideas. The most common organizational patterns in textbooks are cause-effect, definition sequence of events, spatial geographic, thesis example, descriptions, generalization, each of which has its characteristic connectors. These connectors are the best indicators of ideas, hence important for reading comprehension. The best way to teach this is to have students read different passages with different organizational patterns and identifies their connectors.

7. Distinguishing general statements from specific details. General statements contain main ideas, and specific details are explanations and examples that support the general statements. Therefore general statements are more important to comprehension. They are introduced by signal words such as in general, above all, in conclusion. Students should learn to direct their attention to these signal words. They should also learn to identify expressions of probability, frequency, quantity that indicate different levels of generality (certain, probable, always, usually, some, most).

8. Inference and conclusion.

Comprehension involves understanding not only what is stated explicitly but also what is implied. The reader has to make inferences based on what is stated. To do so requires the ability to analyze and synthesize. From the sentence: age affects hearing we can infer that with age hearing increases, decreases or changes. Conclusion is different from inference in that the former is based on putting stated facts together, whereas the latter is based on deduction of what is implied from what is stated. For example: from the statements: Noise prevents people from

sleeping. Noise interrupts sleep. Noise may reduce the quality of sleep. We can conclude that noise is harmful to sleep. In short, to infer, the reader has to read between the lines, whereas to conclude, he has to summarize stated facts.

9. Evaluation and appreciation: This is a high-level comprehension skill. The reader not only has to understand what he has read, he also has to analyze, synthesize it so as to form his own opinion and judgments, to evaluate, the reader has to read critically. The essence of critical reading is to consider what, why and for whom the author has written. The reader has to determine the author's purpose, consider his intended audience, recognize his strengths and weaknesses, and distinguish his opinions from facts. Appreciation is different from evaluation in that the former only

requires the reader to see the merits of the text, whereas the latter requires the reader to see the merits and demerits. To appreciate the reader has to understand the author's tone, attitude, to recognize the literary devices such as the use of figures of speech, to identify his style, humor, satire and irony. Evaluation is a useful skill for reading political and academic essays, whereas appreciation is useful in reading literary works.

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