

Unit Two

Reading

Reading

Key Issues to Remember

1. There are different ways to teach reading just like there are different ways to read something. For example most people **skim** the newspaper; they are simply looking for interesting pieces of information. **Scanning** however is what we do when we have a question and we are searching for the answer; think, for example, of how you read the index of a book when you want a page number. **Pleasure reading** is another form of reading. We can also distinguish between **intensive reading**, when students are asked to understand all of the vocabulary and many of the details they are reading, and **extensive reading**, when students read a text but do not make an effort to understand every word.
2. Because there are **different reasons to read**, teachers need to focus their in-class practice on particular types of activities. Having students practice quick skimming or scanning for example can be a very good and practical use of class time while pleasure reading may be better done outside of class.
3. Reading is a time consuming activity and teachers often feel that reading activities take up too much time in class. One way to make more effective use of class time is to focus on **teaching reading strategies** to students. This approach will help give students the tools they need to become better readers. See *page #3* for more information on this topic.
4. Reading is one of the four language skills. The **active skills** are generally considered to be speaking and writing and the **passive skills** reading and listening. Reading and listening are also called the **input skills** and speaking and writing the **output skills**. Teachers should keep in mind the similarities and differences between these skills as they think about how to work with them in class.
5. **Good in-class reading activities** should have one or all of the following characteristics: **fun, competitive, relevant, challenging**, and **timed**. These characteristics help to keep reading an interesting and valuable part of the interactive classroom.
6. Whenever a teacher does a reading activity in class, they must work hard to make it as **interesting and appealing** to students as possible. This means connecting the reading to some **background knowledge** that the students already possess. Generally this is done through **pre-reading questions** or a **pre-reading introduction** to the text. This approach helps to raise student interest and it also helps with the learning process.
7. Know the **resources of your city** and be able to provide students with information about where and how they can find books and opportunities to read. Also, be prepared with **web-sites** that can help your students to improve

their reading skills. Further reading resources will be discussed in the *resources* section of this unit.

Reading: Activities and Approaches in the Classroom

1. Teaching students how to read is often a more effective use of class time than simply reading in class.

By teaching students some of the skills and strategies they need to become better readers, teachers empower their students to become more effective readers on their own and they also maximize the value of their limited class time. The following are a variety of skills and strategies that you can practice with your student to help them become more skilled and efficient readers.

A. Questions First

This is particularly useful as a test-taking strategy but can also help students in other aspects of reading. Before introducing a text, give students a series of questions to be answered from the reading. Ask them to read the questions and discuss and predict what the answers might be. When you give the text, tell students not to read it but to simply find the answers as quickly as possible. Make this a competitive and timed activity and repeat it several times over the course of a month until students are comfortable with the technique.

B. Active Reading

This activity helps students understand that reading is a process of interacting with the text. Encourage your readers to engage the text by constantly having in mind a series of questions; this makes the reading process more of a dialogue with the text than simply a one-way transmission of ideas. Here are some of the types of questions that good readers often keep in mind while reading:

- What point is the author making here?
- Do I agree with what they are saying?
- Why is the author including this information?

These types of questions help to stimulate and engage the mind of the reader and they also can improve speed and ease of comprehension while reading.

C. Predicting Content

Many textbooks include “pre-reading questions” that are meant to engage the students in the material before reading. A better activity however, can be to ask the students to write the questions themselves. Give the title of the reading piece and maybe one or two sub-headings then ask students, either individually or in groups, to write down four or five questions they expect to be answered while reading. Write some of these questions onto the board before reading for use as follow-up comprehension questions. Through the repetition of this activity students will gain confidence in their ability to predict text content.

D. Self Assessment: Did I Understand that Sentence/Paragraph?

Good readers are constantly assessing their own comprehension and this is a skill that can be taught and practiced in the classroom. This activity should emphasize comprehension over speed as students should be encouraged to work slowly and

accurately. While reading a text, ask your students to ask themselves the following question after finishing each sentence: did I understand that sentence? They should be encouraged to do the same after each paragraph. Put three categories onto the board: grammar, vocabulary, and other. When a student does not understand a sentence or paragraph they should note what category the misunderstanding occurs under. This technique requires honesty and work from the student but it can help them gain a much better understanding of their own reading weaknesses.

E. Make the Text your Own

Students are better readers when they can relate to a text in a particular way and somehow make it their own. When working with a reading piece that covers a controversial topic, divide your class in half and tell them that they are preparing for a debate on the topic contained in the reading. Tell half the class that they agree with the author and are reading to find and highlight his strongest arguments. Tell the other half that they strongly disagree with the author and are reading the piece to find evidence of why the author is wrong. This activity promotes a critical examination of the text and it mirrors real life reading activities that student will likely confront while doing academic research.

2. Your students need to have an awareness of their own reading ability and of their interest level in reading.

Students need to be active learners and this means that they need to think about and reflect on their reading ability. By doing this, students are allowed to assess their own strengths and weaknesses as readers and to begin to take an active role in their own learning process.

Provide your students with **handout #1 (Reading Discussion Questions)** and ask them to complete the chart silently on their own. After they have done this, they should then compare their answers to those of a neighbor and note and discuss any differences of opinion. Ultimately this should lead to a large group or classroom discussion on the various issues addressed in the handout.

3. Reading aloud in class can be both positive and negative, depending on how it is done.

Different people (students and teachers) react differently to the task of reading aloud in class. It can be useful and effective however, so for teachers who are considering it, here are a few things they should remember.

- One student reading and 49 listening is not a good use of class time because the one reading is nervous and the 49 listening are not really listening.
- Divide large classes into groups for reading aloud activities.
- Encourage the “one book open” method of reading aloud; this means that students who are not reading aloud will be more likely to listen attentively and less likely to interrupt the reader with corrections.
- Don’t ask students to read something they are unfamiliar with. Always allow time for them to prepare and familiarize themselves with the material first.
- If you want to correct students on their pronunciation, do it after they have finished the reading.

- Passive learners need a listening option so try to design activities that do not require everyone to read aloud.

4. Reading can be boring! The solution is to use as much variety as possible in reading methods.

Many teachers dread the reading portion of a lesson as it can ruin the interactive and participatory classroom atmosphere that teachers often work hard to create. By using a wide range of reading methods however, the teacher can help keep classes moving along smoothly. Think about the variety of ways that students can “read” in the classroom.

1. The teacher reads aloud and the students follow along silently.
2. The teacher reads aloud and the students repeat chorally, sentence by sentence.
3. Students read and other students follow along in their books.
4. Students read and other student listen with books closed.
5. Students read silently.
6. Pairs of students read to one another from a text.
7. Pairs of students read their own writing to one another.
8. The text is on the wall. Students go to the text, read, and return to share information with others.
9. The text is cut up into chunks (paragraphs for example) and students have to re-arrange it and put it back together in the correct order.

Of course there are many more options to consider but in general teachers need to remember that variety helps to keep the class interesting and it also helps to engage the variety of learning styles that are present in every class.

5. Teachers need to be very careful with the “difficulty” of the text.

Teachers often work hard to find reading material that is interesting for classroom use. This is a valuable goal but unfortunately texts that are particularly interesting are often not of the appropriate level.

Remember that if students encounter more than 5 or 6 new words out of 100 then the text is probably too difficult. Teachers should not put themselves in the situation of having to go through a text word-by-word and explain each new vocabulary item; this is a very poor use of class time.

Instead, if teachers are confronted with text that they know will be challenging, they should have a brief class discussion of its main points and encourage students to read it on their own. This will allow class time to be spent more productively on activities that can benefit everyone.

Handouts for Class

How do you feel about reading?

Instructions: Complete the following survey by putting a check (✓) in the

	Topics	Very True	True	Not Sure	False	Very False
1	Reading is the most interesting part of studying a foreign language.					
2	Reading in class is better than reading at home on my own.					
3	Good readers are usually bad at other subjects like math.					
4	Being able to read a foreign language well is more important than being able to speak well.					
5	Having good grammar knowledge is very important to being a good reader.					
6	Having a large vocabulary is the most important part of being a good reader.					
7	Teachers can't help much with reading; it is mostly the job of the students.					
8	When I read I often get upset and stop because I can't understand.					
9	When I read out loud in class I don't really learn anything.					
10	When we practice reading in class the teacher should give a time limit so we learn to read faster.					

appropriate box to give your opinion about each question.

Further Resources

For Students

1. Project Gutenberg

<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

This site is a collection of over 10,000 books online. They are all free and available to be read.

2. ESL Notes – Movie Guides

<http://www.eslnotes.com/index.html>

This is an interesting website that summarizes the plot and main characters of popular movies and explains long lists of phrases taken from the movies. This site is great for advanced students that want to improve their knowledge of slang.

3. Comics

<http://www.comics.com/>

This site links you with hundreds of comics that are available to be read on-line for free.

4. ESL Online Literature Library

<http://www.1-language.com/library/index.htm>

Here you can find entire books available to be read for free and specifically designed for ESL students.

For Teachers

5. The Internet TESL Journal – Reading

<http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Reading/>

Here teachers can find links to a large number of practical articles how to teach reading and what types of activities work best for teaching reading in the classroom.

6. Ohio ESL

<http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/teacher/reading.html>

This is a great site for teachers with an academic interest in the teaching of reading. It provides links to lots of articles on teaching theory and the role of reading in the classroom.

7. ESL Gold

http://www.eslgold.com/site.jsp?sk=50Ltcwy0CH4KGrsb&resource=pag_stu_reading

Teachers can find lots of lesson plans and activities to use in class to practice reading.