

DEVELOPING READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

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Effective reading is essential for success in acquiring a second language. After all, reading is the basis of instruction in all aspects of language learning: using textbooks for language courses, writing, revising, developing vocabulary, acquiring grammar, editing, and using computer-assisted language learning programs. Reading instruction, therefore, is an essential component of every second-language curriculum [1; 65]. Moreover, according to Dr. West, reading should be given more priority in the teaching process. He emphasizes that reading indicates knowledge of a language, enhances experiences, facilitates the intellectual development of the learner [2; 228].

Reading is not an instinctive human ability such as speaking. Reading is a recent development in the history of the human race. Not every society reads. Humans have not evolved in a way that there is a reading center in the brain.

In order to read, we have to adapt or train our brain to perform in ways it was not naturally designed to work. Nevertheless, oral and written language have much in common. Both are based on the same lexical, grammatical, syntactical and textual rules. The first thing that beginning readers have to experience is that written material is a representation of knowledge they already have, in other words, they have to learn to see the relation between meaning and print. However, while oral language usually is acquired without formal instruction, most children need explicit instruction in the process of learning to read.

1. children have to develop the awareness that words are made up of sounds.
2. they have to develop the awareness that print represents these sounds.
3. they have to develop the understanding that the letters on the page represent these units of sound.

Once they have reached this level of phonological awareness, they are ready to learn to read. For some children this is very difficult. The code-breaking strategy of identifying phonemes as units in the alphabetic code in particular, seems to be



problematic for beginning readers because these phonemes can hardly be perceived as speech. In addition to being able to break up spoken words into smaller units and to understand that letters represent sounds, children need to have a knowledge base, vocabulary knowledge, metacognition, and motivation. Several models of reading development have been proposed to describe the abilities and phases that characterize reading development. Researchers, for example, distinguished three stages in learning to read words: the logographic stage, the alphabetic stage, and the orthographic stage. In the *logographic stage*, children mainly use graphic features to read words without insight into the letter-sound correspondence. Children do not really read in this stage, they remember the features of the letter, the word or the logo. In the *alphabetic stage*, children learn to understand the principle of mapping graphemes onto phonemes to be able to decode both known and unknown words. Crucial in this stage is *phonological awareness* or the awareness of the fact that speech can be divided in smaller units such as syllables and phonemes. The *orthographic* stage distinguishes itself from the alphabetic stage by operating with bigger units, making use of spelling patterns, and being nonphonological.[3.98]

Advanced pupils who are literate in their own language sometimes are “left to their own devices” when it comes to teaching them reading skills. They will simply learn good reading by absorption. In reality, there is much to be gained by focusing on reading skills. It is generally recognized that the efficient reader versed in ways of interacting with various types of texts, is flexible, and chooses appropriate reading strategies depending on a particular text in question. The reader has to match reading skill to reading purpose. We can differ between *reading aloud* and *silent reading*. Reading aloud is not appropriate for advanced pupils. We can use it when we have control reading. At the advanced level the most suitable is silent reading. Sustained silent reading allows pupils to develop a sense of fluency. Also silent reading can help the pupils to increase the speed of their reading. Reading speed is usually not much of an issue for all but the most advanced pupils.

If teachers are teaching beginning level students, this particular strategy will not apply because they are still struggling with the control of a limited vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Intermediate-to-advanced level students need not be speed readers, but we can help them increase reading rate and comprehension efficiency by teaching a few silent reading rules:

- You don't need to "pronounce" each word to yourself.



- Try to visually perceive more than one word at a time, preferably phrases.
- Unless a word is absolutely crucial to global understanding, skip over it and try to infer its meaning from its context.

Aside from these fundamental guidelines, which if followed can help learners to be efficient readers, reading speed is usually not much of an issue for all but the most advanced learners. Academic reading, for example, is something most learners manage to accomplish by allocating whatever time they personally need in order to complete the material. If students can read 250 to 300 words per minute, further concern over speed may not be necessary. It is now generally accepted that reading is not the careful recognition and comprehension of each word on the page in sequence. A good reader use a minimum of 'clues' from the text to reconstruct the writer's message. It is not difficult for the fluent reader to read the text with missing words. Experiments have shown that sometimes readers are not even aware of these things. Their successful reading depends upon their ability to predict what comes next. We read, in sense, what we expect to read, using our knowledge of language and our knowledge of the topic to predict to a large degree what comes next and so move on quickly.

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