

Reading skills

Reading for different purposes is reflected in the different reading skills that all students need to develop if they are to become competent readers. In this section we will look at four skills.

1. **Silent reading** is a skill that everyone needs to adopt in order to be able to read quickly and effectively. It enables the reader's eyes to flow quickly and freely across the page, recognising the individual words and internalising the meaning, but not actually pronouncing them. Many students in countries with limited resources develop the habit of 'silent' reading which in fact is not silent because the students move their lips and whisper to themselves very quietly. This is a habit that some students from richer countries also develop, though perhaps less frequently. This approach defeats the advantages of silent reading because instead of the student's eyes flowing across the page, the student bunny-hops from word to word in a slow parody of efficient silent reading. You should try to discourage this habit in your students, whatever their age and one way to do this is to ask them to hold a pen between their lips while they read. This can help to discourage lip movements.
2. **Reading aloud** is a skill that very few people need to develop, although it is commonly found in English language classes. This is unnecessary since few students are going to be newsreaders and clerics! Unprepared reading aloud should only be done with advanced students and fluent speakers of English. In fact, reading aloud is overused in many classrooms around the world and this is a pity because silent reading is the skill that students really need to develop. Many teachers still cling to the belief that unprepared reading aloud is a useful activity because it demonstrates how well students can pronounce words, while in fact it should be discouraged for a range of different reasons.
 - Students will make mistakes in their pronunciation which means that the teacher either has to ignore the mistakes or repeatedly interrupt the student to make a correction.
 - Silent readers generally read faster than someone reading aloud, and since the rest of the students in the class will be reading silently, they will be reading on *ahead* of the reader and not even listening to what is being said. There is no value if this is what is happening.
 - Those students who read aloud will find it difficult to concentrate on the *meaning* of the passage because they will be concentrating on getting their pronunciation correct.
 - Reading aloud takes considerably longer than silent reading, and is less effective.

- Reading aloud can be traumatic for some of the more self-conscious and less skilled students and they may dread being asked to read in front of their friends.

A little reading aloud can be helpful if there have been adequate preparatory activities and the students have had plenty of time to prepare their reading. However, it is best done on a one-to-one basis (teacher and student together while the other students are doing something else) rather than asking individuals to read aloud in class.

1. **Skimming** is a skill that students need to develop. As the word suggests, it involves the reader in letting their eyes run rapidly over the text in order to discover what the text is about in general. It is a skill that we frequently adopt when we are running our eyes over newspaper articles in order to find out what they are about, and whether they are worth reading through more carefully. This is a skill that research students often find useful when checking through articles in journals, and it is also a skill that many students have to use in more advanced English language tests. One of the important aspects of skimming is that it does not require the students to understand *every* word that they read. Some of the unknown words may not affect their overall understanding of the meaning and some of the unknown words can be guessed from the context. It is important for the students' reading skills that they accept that unknown words will be present in a text, as well as the important ability to deduce the meaning of a new word from the context.
2. Another reading skill, **scanning**, is used when we quickly search through a text looking for specific pieces of information. For example, we may be looking for a specific name or date or reference, and once we spot what we are looking for, we pause and read that section of the text more carefully. It is the skill we use when we want to buy a new car and we scan the small ads to see if there is anything suitable; scanning is a skill that most of us use every day.

These, and other skills, need to be addressed by you, as the teacher, if your younger students are to become efficient readers who enjoy reading. Reading is a multifaceted activity involving a number of different skills, and it needs to be addressed in a number of different ways; skilled teachers will ensure that they both challenge and interest their students.

Task 3

Find an article from a newspaper or a magazine and skim it to find out what the article is about. Next, write down a list of 5 questions that you would like answered in relation to the topic. Finally, scan the text and search for the answers to your questions. (Note: asking the questions doesn't mean that you're going to find the answers!)

