
Goals and techniques for teaching reading comprehension

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Instructors want to produce students who, even if they do not have complete control of the grammar or an extensive lexicon, can fend for themselves in communication situations. In the case of reading, this means producing students who can use reading strategies to maximize their comprehension of text and identify relevant and non-relevant information.

The Reading Process

To accomplish this goal, instructors focus on the process of reading rather than on its product.

- They allow students to practice the full repertoire of reading strategies by using authentic reading tasks. They encourage students to read to learn (and have an authentic purpose for reading) by giving students some choice of reading material.

- When working with reading tasks in class, they show students the strategies that will work best for the reading purpose and the type of text. They explain how and why students should use the strategies.

- They encourage students to evaluate their comprehension and self-report their use of strategies. They build comprehension checks into in-class and out-of-class reading assignments, and periodically review how and when to use particular strategies.

- They explicitly mention how a particular strategy can be used in a different type of reading task or with another skill. [1]

By raising students' awareness of reading as a skill that requires active engagement, and by explicitly teaching reading strategies, instructors help students develop both the ability and the confidence to handle communication situations they may encounter beyond the classroom.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Instruction in reading comprehension strategies is not an add-on, but rather an integral part of the use of reading activities in the classroom. Instructors can help their students become effective readers by teaching them how to use strategies before, during, and after reading.

Before reading: Plan for the reading task

- Set a purpose or decide in advance what to read for
- Decide if more linguistic or background knowledge is needed

During and after reading: Monitor comprehension

- Decide what is and is not important to understand
- Reread to check comprehension

After reading: Evaluate comprehension and strategy use

- Evaluate overall progress in reading and in particular types of reading tasks
- Decide if the strategies were appropriate for the purpose and for the task

Using Authentic Materials and Approaches

To develop communicative competence in reading, classroom and homework activities must resemble (be) real-life reading tasks that involve meaningful communication. They must therefore

be authentic in three ways.

1. The reading material must be authentic: It must be the kind of material that students will need and want to be able to read when studying abroad, or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom.

When selecting texts for student assignments, remember that the difficulty of a reading text is less a function of the language, and more a function of the conceptual difficulty and the task(s) that students are expected to complete.

2. The reading purpose must be authentic: Students must be reading for reasons that make sense and have relevance to them. "Because the teacher assigned it" is not an authentic reason for reading a text.

Ask students how they plan to use the language they and what topics they are interested in reading and learning about. Give opportunities to choose assignments, and encourage them to use the library, the Internet to find other things they would like to read.

3. The reading approach must be authentic: Students should read the text in a way that matches the reading purpose, the type of text, and the way people normally read. This means that reading aloud will take place only outside the classroom, such as reading for pleasure. The majority of students' reading should be done silently.

Students whose language skills are limited are not able to process at this level, and end up having to drop one or more of the elements. Usually the dropped element is comprehension, and reading aloud becomes word calling: simply pronouncing a series of words without regard for the meaning . [2]

Studies show that when students read they improve not only their reading fluency, but they also build new vocabulary knowledge and expand their outlook also. Reading can help students write better, improve listening and speaking skills and develop positive attitudes toward reading in English.

REFERENCES:

1. Alderson J.C. & Urquhart A.H. Reading in a foreign language. London: Longman, 1984.
2. Breen, M.P. Authenticity in the language classroom Applied Linguistics, 1985.