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Teaching Reading

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1. Introduction

In language teaching, the main four skill areas discussed are reading, listening, writing and speaking. Reading and listening are receptive skills, since they are based on the language learners' ability to comprehend written and aural texts, while writing and speaking are productive skills and are based on the active written and spoken language production of the language learner.

In the present unit, we are going to explore
- what, why and how people read generally and
- what language learners read in language classes, with what purpose and how
in order to gain a better insight into how language teachers can prepare their learners to be able to read and understand target language texts.

2. What why and how

People read a variety of different texts in their everyday lives both in their mother tongues and in the foreign languages that they might speak. When we think about 'teaching reading', we need to consider the multiplicity of the different situations in which people read and the different text types they come across.

2.1 What sorts of texts do people read – with what purpose and how

In the present subchapter you will be guided through what text types people with different background are likely to encounter both in their native and in their foreign languages, why they – need to – read them and how they actually do it.

2.1.1 Text types

Task 1

Look at the text types below in the word cloud. Write in the three columns which types of texts you expect the three imaginary learners of English to read. Then highlight the text types that you think they might need to read in English at some stage in their lives. You will probably find that many of the text types may be read by more than one type of reader.

comics
laws and regulations
business emails
personal emails
instruction manuals
self-help books
novels
poems
recipes
technical literature
interviews
leaflets
blogs
short stories
film subtitles
non-fiction books (eg. about nature, pets or science)
news or magazine article
signs (eg. Staff only, No smoking etc)
advertisements
websites
short messages (sms, tweets)
wikipedia etc. entries
presentations
product description

An elementary school learner	A secondary school teenager	an adult professional (someone with a university degree)

2.2 Purposes

As you could see from the above task, people read a large variety of texts for different purposes and in very different ways. Open the ppt in the attached folder and read and listen to the presentation on what readers' purposes may be and how they may read texts.

2.3 How

As regards HOW we read texts, continue reading and listening to the presentation in the ppt. Take notes regarding what the following terms mean:

- Receptive reading
- Reflective reading
- Skim reading
- Scanning

Whether we read receptively or reflectively, or just scan or skim a text, one thing is common in these reading experiences: we read the texts for information or pleasure, and don't study them in detail. This is usually referred to as ***extensive reading*** in the EFL literature.

3. What do language learners read in the language class – with what purposes and how?

Let's now turn our attention to the foreign language class and see what there is to read. If we only think of course books, even the most elementary ones consist of a myriad of letters, and in the broad sense of the word, they are all there for the learner to 'read'. Students need to perform a vast amount of reading to complete all the language tasks (grammar and vocabulary exercises, word definitions, grammar explanations, etc.) and to know what they are to do (instructions for the tasks). If we consider these, however, reading is a *means* of learning, not the *goal* of learning.

When we are discussing the topic of 'teaching reading', we are not interested in all the reading that goes on in the language lesson in this very broad sense of the word. Consequently, from now on, we are only going to focus on the texts designed for the development of reading skills and the tasks devised around it.

3.1 Text types

 Task 2

Click on the link and look at the free sample unit of a popular coursebook.
https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/adult_courses/new_english_file/upper-intermediate/?cc=global&selLanguage=en

Read all the texts in the above sample unit. In the table below they are listed by title for easier identification.
What kind of texts are they? Where are they from originally? Are they authentic texts or have they been modified, or even written by the coursebook authors especially for teaching purposes? Fill in the table:

Text	Kind of text	Source	Authentic or modified or fabricated?
What's your soundtrack? (p.71)	*Like a magazine article*	*Not given. Refers to research by psychologists from the universities of Cambridge and Texas*	*probably written by the coursebook authors*
Sleepy people – the dangers of sleep deprivation (p.73)			
15-year-old girl found asleep on crane (p.75)			
Breaking news texts (p.76-77)			
The theatre critic and the sports journalist (pp. 78-79)			
Still awake after 33 years (p.83)			

Key

Text	Kind of text	Source	Authentic or modified or fabricated?
What's your soundtrack? (p.71)	Like a magazine article	Not given. Refers to research by psychologists from the universities of Cambridge and Texas	probably written by the coursebook authors
Sleepy people – the dangers of sleep deprivation (p.73)	Like an article	Not given.	probably written by the coursebook authors
15-year-old girl found asleep on crane (p.75)	Short news article	Not given	probably written by the coursebook authors
Breaking news texts (p.76-77)	Short news articles	One of them is given in the back of the book: The Guardian, 2006	The one that is acknowledged is probably modified, the others completely written by the coursebook authors
The theatre critic and the sports journalist (pp. 78-79)	articles	The Times	Probably adapted (as no exact reference is given)
Still awake after 33 years (p.83)	article	not provided	probably written by the coursebook authors

 Thinking task

In **Task 1** above you highlighted the text types that you think learners of English might need to read in English at some stage in their lives.
Compare your list with the text types found in the above sample unit and any other coursebooks that you might possess or that you find sample units of on the internet. Which text types do not typically feature in language textbooks?

Why do you think they were not included? Was it for length reasons? For copyright reasons? Are they perhaps too special for a general audience (which coursebook writers aim to write materials for)? Or are they perhaps too difficult as regards the language used in it?

 Key

Coursebook writers generally aim to include texts that are interesting, seem 'fresh', but at the same time contain generally relevant vocabulary and structures that the learner has already acquired or can at least follow at that stage. For this purpose they usually take ideas from articles or interviews or other sources – and adapt them to suit the levels and needs of their target audience.

3.2 Purposes

Task 2

Now look at the texts of the sample unit again. What role does each have in the unit, with what purpose is it most likely to be used in the lesson?

Fill in the table.

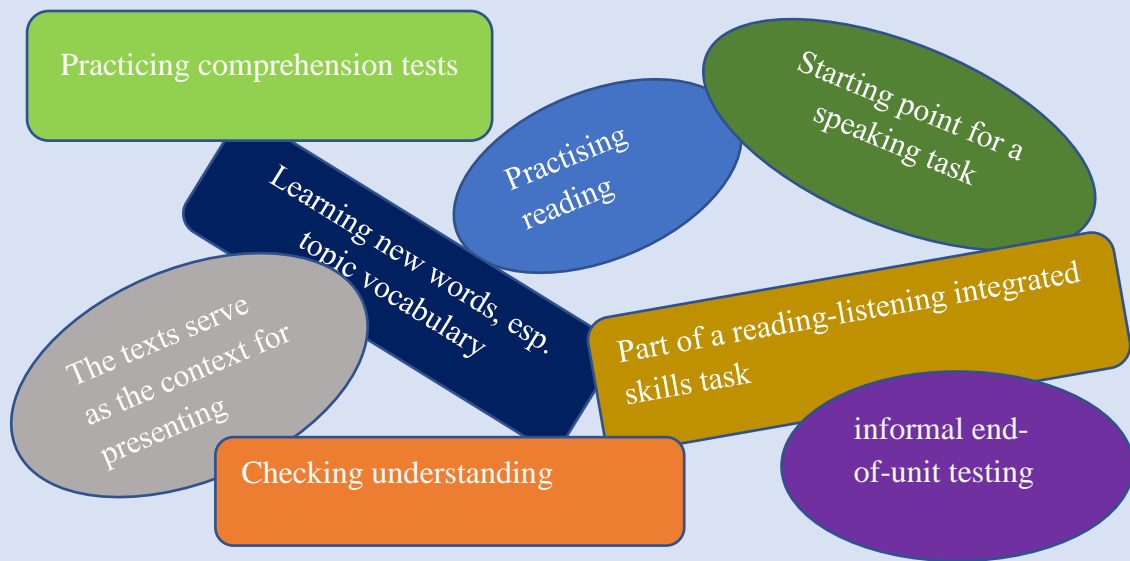| Text	Purpose in the lesson
What's your soundtrack? (p.71)	*Practising reading* *Learning topic vocabulary (music)* *Starting point for a speaking task*
Sleepy people – the dangers of sleep deprivation (p.73)	
15-year-old girl found asleep on crane (p.75)	
Breaking news texts (p.76-77)	
The theatre critic and the sports journalist (pp. 78-79)	
Still awake after 33 years (p.83)	

A key to this task will be provided later. First, however, go on to Task 3.

Task 3

Now take a look at the following hints. Think your answers above once again, based on the hints and modify your solutions if you need to. You can use some of the answers more than once. Also, more than one answer might apply to certain texts.

Practicing comprehension tests

Learning new words, esp. topic vocabulary

Practising reading

Starting point for a speaking task

The texts serve as the context for presenting

Part of a reading-listening integrated skills task

Checking understanding

informal end-of-unit testing

Key

Text	Purpose in the lesson
What's your soundtrack? (p.71)	*Practising reading* *Learning new words, esp. topic vocabulary (music)* *Starting point for a speaking task*
Sleepy people – the dangers of sleep deprivation (p.73)	Practising reading Learning new words, esp. topic vocabulary (sleep) Starting point for a speaking task
15-year-old girl found asleep on crane (p.75)	Part of a reading-listening integrated skills task
Breaking news texts (p.76-77)	The texts serve as the context in which the grammar item for the unit is presented (reported speech using a variety of reporting verbs)
The theatre critic and the sports journalist (pp. 78-79)	A multiple choice grammar and/or vocabulary exercise, as well as the True or False comprehension task not just a popular comprehension check task type, but is also part of most language tests in the world. The aim is probably to check how learners are able to cope with such a task type at the level where they are now, and possibly also to prepare learners for these test types.
Still awake after 33 years (p.83)	Practising multiple choice gap-fill tasks (eg. for exam purposes). In this particular unit the teacher can use this exercise (as well as the others on this double-page) for informal end-of-unit testing purposes.

As you can see from the above tasks, 'texts' in coursebooks and in the language lessons are used for a variety of purposes, and not solely to promote reading competence.

3.3 How

The opposite of extensive reading is *intensive reading*, in the process of which the text is not only read for comprehension but is also studied for academic or language learning purposes.

Task 4

The following links will guide you to free sample units of three popular course books. Click on each of them and read the passages Then look at all the activities designed to go with the reading passages and decide if they *primarily* aim to
a) support the learner in making sense of the text or
b) use the text as a springboard material for some language work (in the broadest sense of the word, i.e. including learning or consolidating vocabulary or structures, getting familiar with discourse elements, or practising speaking or writing.)

1) https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/adult_courses/new_english_file/upper-intermediate/?cc=global&selLanguage=en
2) https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/adult_courses/english_file_third_edition/intermediate/?cc=de&selLanguage=de
3) https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/adult_courses/new_headway/intermediate_fourth_edition/?cc=global&selLanguage=enu%27ll

Click on the following link and fill in your answers to the above question in the online test:
https://redmenta.com/?solve&ks_id=810974328
For easier reference, the texts are listed by page numbers and titles, as well as the numbers of the activities to consider.

Summary

By studying the present material you have gained an overview of what types of texts people read and for what purposes both in their mother tongues and in the foreign language(s) that they are learning. By now you understand what extensive and intensive reading is and what role activities designed for the reading passages have in the language learning process.

References

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