

Types of Reading

(Reading with a Purpose)

When we read something, we usually read for a particular purpose. For instance, we read the front page of a newspaper to find out what the latest news is. We read a train time-table to find out when trains leave and arrive. We read a telephone directory to find out someone's telephone number. We read a novel for enjoyment. We read a text book to learn the subject we are studying, and so on. According to our purpose, we adopt different types of reading. Sometimes we are slow, sometimes quick. Sometimes, we just go through a book; sometimes we study it deeply. In this context, the language experts have pointed out four types of reading.

1. Skimming:

Literally 'skimming' means taking off cream from milk. In language study, it means reading something very quickly to find out what is it about. By running our eyes quickly over the text, we get the gist or main idea and a general view without worrying about the detail. When a person skims some text, he reads selectively. We skim generally for two reasons: to avoid reading the whole text and save time, and to decide if a text is worth reading. Skimming is a sub-skill of reading and a student must learn it. A text usually consists of a number of paragraphs. Each paragraph contains one main idea or topic.

The student should learn to search for the topic sentence which is often the first or the last in the paragraph. Sometimes, the reading of the first and the last paragraph of the text can be helpful in getting the general idea. The title of the text or inside headings can also help in skimming. It is a useful technique in extensive reading such as newspaper reading and novel reading.

2. Scanning:

Literally 'scanning' means locating or discovering the place of something. In language study, it means reading a text quickly to look for a specific piece of information. It is faster than skimming. In skimming we find out the gist but here we look for only one bit of information. When scanning, we run our eyes rapidly down the page, searching for the particular information. In this type of reading, we should keep our eyes on headings, bold words, capital letters for a name, and numbers for dates. In our daily life, we use this skill to find out a particular word in dictionary, a number in telephone directory, timings of trains and aeroplanes in time-table. To do this, we do not have to read carefully the whole dictionary, telephone directory, and time-table. We scan (examine hastily) the page or pages until our eye discovers the required information we are looking for.

3. Intensive Reading:

It is also called 'Study Reading'. It means the close and deep reading usually of a short text. It is slow reading as it takes time and effort. A great deal of class room reading, poetry or prose, is of this type. We also read intensively the written instructions, recipes, application forms, and question papers in the examination halls. The aim of this kind of reading is full understanding of the text. The reader has to pay a great deal of attention to detail. He has to learn the meanings of individual words. He has to translate or paraphrase the text. Above all, he has to take notice of the punctuation, sentences and paragraphs, and grammar.

4. Extensive Reading:

It means reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure. Unlike intensive reading, extensive reading is done mostly outside the class room in spare time. It is reading at home without the control and help of the teacher. The aim here is to get on with the story, to read for gist, not detail. Novel reading is an example of extensive reading. This type of reading is highly motivating. The reader enjoys it. He gets a chance to read at his own speed, and according to his own style.

Strategies to Improve Reading Speed

It is common observation that most of our students cannot read a text with suitable speed and proper understanding. Besides others, one of the reasons is that they are not taught how to read effectively and with a good speed. To improve the reading speed and comprehension of the students, the teacher can use the following activities and strategies in the class room:

1. Reading in Chunks:

We read with the help of our eyes. They do not necessarily progress word by word. In fact, our eyes read groups of letters or words. The teacher should teach the students to read in chunks (short pieces). They should be trained to take in four or five words in a single eye glance. This training will increase the speed of their reading.

2. Guessing the meanings of Words:

Unfamiliar words in a text cause difficulty for the students. Some of the students stop over a word and look up for meaning in dictionary. They should be told that very often the meanings of words can be guessed with the help of their context (surrounding words). Sometimes, the structure of a word can give a hint to its meanings. The students should be trained to use these clues, structure and context, to guess the meanings.

3. Pre-viewing:

It means looking over a text before reading it properly. If a student wishes to read a book, he can have a fair idea of its content just by looking at its title, its blurb (back title), reviews on it, its preface or foreword and its content-pages. This activity mentally prepares him for what he is going to read.

4. Anticipation:

It means guessing what is likely to occur in a text at a global (vast or higher) level.. When we anticipate, we guess about the general contents of a book, about its main theme or topic. For example, by looking at the title of a book, we can anticipate its contents or what is the book about. Similarly, the headings in newspapers and magazines give a clue to what the news item is about.

5. Prediction:

While anticipation means to guess at a global level, prediction is concerned with guessing at a lower and more local level. we may say anticipation operates at a macro (very large) level; prediction operates at a micro (very small) level. While reading a text, the students should learn to predict what comes next at the level of words, phrases and sentences.

6. Silent Reading:

In our schools, reading aloud is practised, but silent reading is usually ignored. No doubt, loud reading has its own importance, but at

higher levels of language, silent reading is more important. In silent reading, the reader has many advantages. He can stop and think or re-think. He can give pauses and refer back to re-read certain points. He can skip certain lines or pages. In silent reading, the reader's speed is faster. In reading aloud, the reader is deprived of these benefits.

7. Variations in Style and Speed:

The students read a text with some purpose. They should be trained to change their style and speed according to the purpose and nature of the text. For example, if they read to get a gist of some text, they should use skimming. If they need a specific information, they should apply scanning. If they are reading in detail for full comprehension, their reading should be intensive. If they want to read just for pleasure, their reading style should be extensive.

The While-reading Activities

In modern language teaching practice, a reading lesson is usually divided into three phases. We start the lesson with Pre-reading activities and end the lesson with Post-reading activities. While-reading activities form the middle phase of the lesson. These activities are the most important as they help the students to understand the content of the text, and to perceive the structure of the text. Some of such useful activities are as follows: