UNIT 12 DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

Structure

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

Unit 11 emphasized the need for teaching reading as a skill in its own right. We should remember, however, that reading is not a general ability, but a complex phenomenon that embraces a wide variety of tasks, activities, skills and mental processes. In fact, we can say that it is as varied as life. Besides, it occurs at various levels and is influenced by several factors like the reader’s purpose, his/her interest in the material, and the difficulty of the selection s/he attempts to read. Special kinds of instructional help is needed for developing many of the skills of reading. We cannot think of strategies for the development of reading competence in our students without first specifying the reading skills that need to be developed.

Some children acquire the necessary skills without formal instruction. Given an environment which is conducive to reading in every respect, they learn from the beginning to get meaning from the printed page and almost unconsciously develop the ability to recognise and understand words, to comprehend sentences and even longer units. Most children, however, need to be helped by specific instruction in reading skills. They must be shown how to adapt their speed of reading both to the nature of the material read and to their own purpose. It is no light matter to acquire the wide range of abilities and skills involved in reading, but these skills can be learned through guided practice.

12.2 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:

- specify the various abilities and sub-skills involved in reading and understanding what we read, and, consequently, recognise the complexity of reading;
- reflect on the objectives of a programme for the development of reading skills;
- consider the various criteria to be used in selecting materials for reading;
- explore some types of classroom activities to develop reading competence.
12.3 READING SKILLS

Having begun to read, good readers operate cognitively at four highly interrelated and overlapping levels of meaning: the literal, the interpretive, the critical, and the creative. What is involved is understanding meanings at each of these four levels and how teachers can encourage students to think in these ways as they read. Let us find out about these levels:

Literal: Literal comprehension involves the reader in understanding the information stated directly in a text. That information may be facts and details, sequences of events, main ideas and generalizations, causes and effects. The key element in comprehension at this level is that the information is present "in black and white" in the text. The reader does not have to dig too deeply to get at it. S/he should be able to state exactly what the passage is saying, to make sure that s/he understands it. For example, if the piece of writing is about someone digging the earth, the reader should be able to state what the person is actually doing—"digging the earth".

Literal comprehension is of fundamental importance. It requires a thorough understanding of paragraph, sentence and word meanings and is required for higher levels of comprehension.

Interpretive: To read at the interpretive level, on the other hand, is to read 'between the lines', to recognise ideas and information not directly stated. In doing so, the reader must make inferences. S/he may have to infer time relationships - the year, time of day, and season; geographical relationships; cause and effect relationships; the ages, feelings and familial relationships of characters; main ideas and generalizations if these are not stated explicitly in the text. In other words, the reader must study the facts given in the text and put two and two together in making the inference.

Writers do not always state facts directly. They imply emotions and attitudes, and suggest points of view. For instance, an author may not state directly that a particular character is bad, but the words s/he uses do describe that person and the situation s/he present him/her in may convey the author's attitude towards that character. A perceptive reader should be able to recognise this attitude. S/he must be able to get beyond the surface meanings of words and see what the implications of such words are. For instance, the same persons could be called "terrorists" or "freedom fighters" according to the writer's attitude towards them. Similarly, in describing someone eating, a writer may use the words, "wolfed down" or "guzzled" or "slobbered". If the writer is describing a baby eating, these words may be merely a statement of fact, but if they are about an adult, there may well be a suggestion of distaste towards the person who is eating.

Interpretive reading also involves ferreting out meanings expressed through literary allusions, idiomatic, expressions, and figures of speech. The writer who writes of a character, "He had no heart", does not mean this literally but is relying on an idiom to communicate meaning. Another author who describes a person as having a Midas touch is communicating something special, something meaningful, only to the reader who recognises the allusion to the king who wanted everything he touched to turn to gold. The poet who speaks of "crossing the bar" is referring metaphorically to death; he is not speaking literally of crossing a sand bar. The scientist who refers to the earth as a lifeboat to explain relationships aboard a plant troubled by the problems of limited resources and increasing population is also relying on metaphor to put his/her message across.

One of the most difficult interpretations a reader must make is in terms of these kinds of inferences. The reader must bring to bear his/her previous experiences with language, literature, and life in constructing meanings.

Critical: Critical reading requires making judgements with regard to a text. The reader may judge the accuracy of facts, the validity of conclusions drawn, or the effectiveness of the author's style. The reader may not like the way the author has begun a piece of writing, sentences together, and used language. For instance, a writer may use very flowery language to create an atmosphere, or s/he may write 'tongue in cheek'.

Critical reading also requires giving reasons for the judgement and stating the criteria used in making it, commenting on the views expressed in the passage and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the treatment of those ideas.
Creative: Creative reading calls for the generation of new ideas, insights, applications and approaches. It requires invention, prediction, and use of the imagination. Proposing an alternative conclusion or generalization based on a reading text and suggesting related examples are exercises in creative reading. Composing orally, drawing, and writing stories with the same pattern or same words as in those that one has read are also exercises in creative reading.

A major problem often noticed in the questions that teachers ask as part of reading instruction is the predominance of questions at the literal level. No doubt children must “get the facts straight” before making valid inferences and judgements based on them, but the neglect of questions at the other levels may mean that children do not develop these abilities to the extent that they should. As teachers, we should ask ourselves whether we are giving adequate attention to all the four levels, and also whether the comprehension exercises in the texts prescribed for study do contain questions at all the four levels.

The skills and strategies of reading we hope to develop in our students may be stated broadly as follows:

a) Skills involving flexibility of technique: variations in reading rate, skimming, scanning, study reading, etc.

b) Skills of using non-textual information: that is, information that is strictly not part of the text itself: reference apparatus, graphic conventions, illustrations and diagrams.

c) Word-attack skills: recognising the letters of the alphabet and reading groups of letters as words, understanding the meaning of words by using morphology, contextual clues or a dictionary.

d) Text-attack skills: interpreting the text as a whole using all the clues available including cohesion and rhetorical structure.

Of these, the text-attack skills are perhaps the most complex in the reading process. To develop these skills, we need to use texts which exhibit the characteristics of a true discourse; that is, texts which have a recognisable content, and are coherent and structured.

What do we understand by flexibility of technique? One of the main characteristics of a good reader is that she/varies the speed of her reading according to the nature of the text she is reading and her purpose in reading it. Not only the speed of reading, but even the way she reads a text will vary.

Students may read for pure recreation and enjoyment, or they may read to study. They may find pleasure in study type reading too, but their attitude, approach and technique will be different. They may read to find the answer to a question or the solution to a problem, to learn the main idea of a selection or some specific types of information, to discover the result of a series of events or to follow directions in making a doll, a model aeroplane, or baking a cake, or learning the legal implications of an action. For all of these purposes, they employ different methods in their reading. For example, they cannot afford to go through a legal document in precisely the same way as they read a bestseller on a journey. If they do so, they may misinterpret the document or may not fully appreciate its legal provisions.

Many students are used to plodding through all types of text precisely in much the same way, namely word by word. So we must make them understand the need for flexibility in speed and technique of reading. In particular, we must distinguish the technique of skimming and scanning.

By skimming we mean skimming over the surface of a piece of writing, or glancing rapidly through a text, to find out its general content, central idea(s), or gist. We do this, for example, when we want to find out whether a certain article is relevant to our own area of study or research, or when we glance over a page of a newspaper to see if there is anything worth reading in detail, or when we leaf through a book to find out its subject matter.

By scanning, on the other hand, we mean darting over much of a text to search for a specific item or piece of information that we wish to discover. This skill therefore also involves the ability to reject or pass over irrelevant information. It is the kind of reading we do when, for example, we read through a biographical account to find out the date on which a certain event happened, or when we go through the table of contents in a book to see whether a certain aspect of a problem has been dealt with in the book, or when we glance through the telephone directory looking for a person’s telephone number.
In both these techniques, the reader passes his/her eyes over the text so that they permit him/her to take in only the beginnings and ends of paragraphs, chapter headings and subheadings, and so on. They enable a reader to focus selectively on parts of a text that are worth spending time on.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

   b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. What are the four levels of comprehension?

2. Mention any two interpretive abilities with examples.

3. What does 'critical reading' involve?

4. Give two or three examples of 'creative reading' preferably giving examples other than the ones given in this Unit.

5. What does flexibility of reading depend on?

6. Differentiate between 'skimming' and 'scanning'.
12.4 OBJECTIVES OF A READING PROGRAMME

The general aim of a reading development programme can be stated as follows:

To enable students to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at an appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding. Each phrase of this statement has specific implications for teaching.

a) **to enable students**: The teacher can only try to promote the reading ability in the students, because reading is a private activity. In the reading class, therefore, it is what the student does, not what the teacher does, that counts.

b) **to read without help**: We cannot expect the teacher to help with the reading tasks they undertake in real life outside the classroom. Therefore, students have to develop the ability to read on their own. The teacher should gradually 'disappear' from the class - should make his/her own help unnecessary to the students.

c) **unfamiliar texts**: An independent reader must be able to tackle texts s/he has never seen before, and the teacher should equip the students to do so.

d) **authentic texts**: The reading skill will be of some practical use only if it enables students to read texts they actually require for some authentic purpose, or texts they will have occasion to read after they have left the course.

e) **appropriate speed**: A flexible speed is the mark of a competent reader. So we need to train our students to use different reading rates for different materials and different purposes, instead of plodding through every text at the same careful speed.

f) **silently**: People seldom need to read aloud in real life. All readers need the skill of reading silently, which increases one's understanding of a text.

g) **with adequate understanding**: We need to understand enough of the text to suit our purpose, and we frequently do not need to read or understand every word. Students must recognise the need for such flexibility in understanding too.

Before we attempt to specify the objectives of a reading programme, we need to distinguish two kinds of reading described traditionally as intensive and extensive reading (sometimes also called reading for accuracy and reading for fluency respectively). The labels indicate a difference in classroom procedures as well as a difference in purpose.

**Intensive reading** involves the learners working through a relatively short passage under the guidance of the teacher and examining it closely and in detail. The aim is to arrive at a detailed and thorough understanding of the text. Material for intensive reading is chosen with a view to developing the student's powers of judgement and discriminative reasoning of interpretation and appreciation. Students learn to scan for information, to read with careful attention and concentration, and to extract the major ideas and arguments. Attention is also paid to the logical development of ideas and style in writing.

**Extensive reading**, on the other hand, involves reading in quantity without bothering to check every unknown word or structure. Our main purpose in helping our students with extensive reading should be to train them to read fluently in English for their own enjoyment and without the aid of a teacher. Students are encouraged to read widely on subjects which interest them personally (artistic, political, social scientific) and share what they have enjoyed with their fellow students. They are expected to be able to discuss not only the content but the implications of what they read. Reading now becomes a technique, not an end in itself, and language becomes a vehicle, a tool, and a model. The material that the students are encouraged to read should be more easily and readily accessible in language and content than that which is studied intensively. How about reading in second language? How can we help our students to read extensively in English?

**Extensive reading** should play an important part in the process of second language learning for several reasons. First, it is an activity that can be carried out by the students on their own, outside the classroom. It thus complements the learning that takes place in the classroom because it provides valuable reinforcement of language already presented in the classroom as well as gives students useful practice in skills such as inferring meaning from the context when structures and vocabulary are not familiar. Besides, class time is limited...
Reading Comprehension

and the amount of reading needed to achieve fluency and efficiency is very great. So extensive reading is necessary. Moreover, it may be the only way in which a student can keep contact with English after s/he has completed the course.

Furthermore, as extensive reading is, or should be, reading for pleasure on topics that interest the students, it increases their motivation and gives them a more positive attitude towards the target language. It may also provide the student an excellent opportunity to increase reading speed, particularly because this skill is rarely developed in the ordinary English classroom. As the students are reading for pleasure, they will be eager to know what happens next and will therefore try to read faster. Thus, the more students read extensively, the faster they learn to read.

Although extensive reading involves a lot of reading out of class, some class time has to be devoted to it both to maintain the students interest in it and to train them how to cope with longer texts. Students who have not acquired the reading habit are often put off by the long books usually prescribed for supplementary reading. They need guidance and encouragement through an organized programme.

The syllabus for intensive reading has to be spelt out in terms of reading skills and abilities, and not merely in terms of an anthology of prose passages and poems, as is usually done in schools and colleges. Some of the main reading skills required of the general second language student are given below. Even though all the reading abilities listed here are important and have to be cultivated for efficient reading, the emphasis will vary from one level to another and this emphasis will determine the selection and grading of abilities as well as the texts used for developing those abilities.

Another point to be remembered is this: not all texts will lend themselves to practising all the reading skills - some texts clearly lend themselves to certain skills rather than others, and the teacher must keep this in mind. Similarly, no single reading lesson has to cover all the skills. What is important is that, over a period of time, say a term or a year, the teacher must ensure that s/he provides the students with practice in those skills which seem appropriate to their needs, through a range of texts and activity types. The skills and abilities outlined here must therefore be treated only as a checklist that provides guidelines for classroom work and evaluation.

After completing a course in intensive reading, a student should be able to:

a) skim a passage to identify the topic, the central theme, and other general ideas and information to ensure that s/he reads only what is relevant.

b) scan to locate specific details or items of information.

c) grasp the meaning of words and phrases in context, and interpret, idiomatic, figurative and other non-literal uses of language.

d) understand the meaning of punctuation.

e) understand the rhetorical organization of a text and make use of his/her understanding in interpreting a complex message.

f) recognize and discriminate between facts, beliefs, judgements, opinions, hypotheses, and expressions of bias, probability, uncertainty, tentativeness, etc.

g) understand the relationship between sentences and clauses in a text by making use of the reference system, discourse markers, etc.

h) understand logical relationships between sentences and parts of a text such as cause and effect, general and specific, pros and cons, generalization and support, equivalence, etc.

i) make inferences and form generalizations based on a text and justify them with evidence from the text.

j) make use of non-text information (e.g. diagrams, graphs) to supplement textual information, thereby increasing his/her understanding of the text.

k) select information from a text and use it for a particular purpose (e.g., presenting it in note form, presenting arguments for or against a proposition, taking part in role-plays, discussions, etc.)
Developing Reading Skills

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

7. What should be the overall aim of a reading programme?
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8. Distinguish between ‘intensive reading’ and ‘extensive reading’.
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9. Give at least two reasons why an extensive reading component is necessary in a reading programme.
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10. Among the various abilities and sub-skills of reading, which ones would you mainly focus on at the primary level? At the secondary level? List them separately.
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If we agree that reading involves skills and abilities that we need to develop in our students, we must ask ourselves what kinds of texts will be suitable for our purpose.

**What criteria should we adopt in selecting texts for intensive reading?**

Obviously, a reading text should be at the right level of linguistic difficulty for the students. Linguistic difficulty is a combination of structural and lexical (i.e. vocabulary) difficulty. A likely cause of structural difficulty beyond the elementary levels is the length and complexity of sentences, which can make the relationships among the various parts of a text difficult for the reader to sort out. At the lexical level, if we choose texts with a high proportion of new vocabulary items (words and idioms or compound phrases), it will defeat the aims of the reading programme except when we only want the students to get the gist of a text.

However, readability is not only a matter of grammatical complexity and lexical difficulty. It also depends on the interest of the reader in the text. A text that grips the reader will carry his/her along in spite of its linguistic difficulty. The opposite is also true; dull material, even if it is written in a simple language, will make readers plod along and will not help in developing their reading competence.

Outside the classroom, in our daily life, we mostly read things we are really interested in, for some reason or other. The same principle should be applied in our choice of reading materials for our students. That is, we should select topics that would appeal to them and have some relevance for them. Therefore, one of the criteria for text selection would be the students’ interest, which we can find out through a survey of the students’ reading tastes.

In addition to ensuring that the topics dealt with in the passages for intensive reading would appeal to the students, we should select texts that would introduce the students to new and relevant ideas and make them think about them, help them to understand the way people with different backgrounds, problems or attitudes feel or think, and make them want to read for themselves.

Another criterion for text selection would be **authenticity of language**. What do we mean by authentic language? It is the language from which the features of real language have not been filtered out for language teaching purposes; that is, language written originally for communication in a non-teaching context. To learn to read properly, the student must, early on, learn to deal with all the features of written English in authentic real life communicative contexts.

One objection that is often raised against the use of authentic language in the classroom is that it would be far too difficult for students to cope with because it is unedited and not written specially for language teaching purposes, with proper selection and grading of structures and vocabulary: that is, there is no control exercised by the teacher over the language employed in such texts.

But authentic language need not necessarily be difficult for the students. We can easily find many pieces of authentic language use, such as signboards, road signs, leaflets, brochures, announcement notices, advertisements, newspaper and magazine/articles, and so on which are written in simple language – not simplified language. Even if some of these texts are complex in language use, easy tasks may be set on them so that the texts become accessible to even elementary level students.

Yet another criterion for text selection is variety of formats, registers, and organisational patterns. Outside the language classroom we may read newspapers, magazine articles, cartoon strips, letters, instructions, cookery books, tourist brochures and maps, pamphlets, menus, time-tables, detective stories, etc. The full range of text materials must be brought into the classroom for language work. We have to choose texts from many sources to give our students a wide range of materials in particular, texts of the kind the students will later read for themselves, for study or other specific purposes as well as for pleasure.

Furthermore, for intensive reading, we need to choose material that is not only interesting and appealing to students but worth spending time on, that is, it should be exploitatable. Short texts are usually chosen for intensive study. A text that cannot be exploited to develop our students’ competence as readers is of no use for teaching even if the students enjoy reading.
When we choose a text, therefore, we need to be clear about the interpretive abilities it demands and the methods we will be able to use to help our students to develop those abilities. Students should also be able to interact with the texts on their own, without too much mediation by the teacher.

**Extensive Reading**

The aim of an extensive reading programme is to establish the habit of reading among our students. It is not difficult to create this habit if the books are well chosen. When we choose books for extensive reading, the criteria of readability (i.e., suiting the linguistic level of the reader) and suitability of content are even more important than when we choose a text for intensive reading, because we expect the student to read the books on his/her own.

Extensive reading materials should, therefore, be:

a) **Easy**: The language must be easier than that found in the course book because the guidance of the teacher or the task is absent for the student. To develop fluent reading it is far more useful to read a lot of easy materials than a few difficult ones.

b) **Short**: The length of the book must not be daunting. Elementary level students need short books that they can finish quickly without a sense of strain and without getting bored.

c) **Appealing**: The book will be appealing if it is attractive in appearance, well-printed and with good coloured illustrations - more illustrations and bigger print for more elementary students. The books should not smell of the classroom; notes and questions are better omitted.

d) **Varied**: There must be a wide choice of books to suit the varying needs and wants to the students in terms of content, language, and intellectual and emotional maturity.

**Check Your Progress**

**Notes**: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

11. What are the sources of 'linguistic difficulty' of a text?

12. Why should the reading materials be 'interesting' to students?

13. Explain the meaning of 'authentic language' in the context of language learning.

14. Distinguish between 'simple language' and 'simplified language'.

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15. What do you understand by the 'exploitability' of a reading text.

16. Outline briefly the nature of extensive reading materials.

12.6 CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Reading involves looking at sentences and words, recognising them, and understanding them. It is a process of making sense of written language. The main way in which students learn to read is by reading. So, the more guided practice students have in 'making sense' of written messages, the better they will be able to do it.

Teaching Basic Reading

At the very earliest stages of learning to read, children must learn to distinguish among visual symbols (for example, the d and the b) and acquire a 'sight word' vocabulary, a repertoire of words that they recognise and find meaningful on sight without a complicated analysis. This will help young children gain control over the written symbols of language so that they can understand texts later. Therefore, it will be useful to give children practice in recognising words.

A simple way of doing this is to write words or phrases on pieces of paper or cards. These cards may be called 'word cards'.

Hold up the first card. Point to it and say the words. Ask the class to repeat once or twice. Then do the same with the other cards. Hold up the cards again, this time in a different order. Do not say anything but pause for a while to give the whole class a chance to look at the words. Ask one of the children to say what they are.

This technique is called 'Look and Say', because children look at the words and then say what they are. But the important part of the activity is looking and understanding. Saying the words is not an essential part of reading; it is just a way of checking whether the children can recognise the words. Therefore, we need not ask children to keep repeating the word – the activity should focus on reading, not on speaking.

Teachers can create a classroom environment in which children are immersed in meaning-filled print. Children's desks may be labelled with their names, the door may be labelled DOOR, and windows, chairs and walls may also bear labelling cards. Number words may be hung from the ceiling next to the numbers themselves and colour words next to colour samples. As children and teacher talk together, they can refer to the labels. Children will locate words and labels that apply to what they are talking about. They use the words that fill the classroom as they narrate stories or write on their own.

Furthermore, think of the early experiences of children with print at home: the label on the soap they use or the shampoo bottle – the recipe for making noodles or the advertisements on TV; outside home: the neon signs in the street or the words like, PUSH, PULL, ENTER, EXIT, IN and OUT in shops or cinema houses, often accompanied by visual clues. These
are not constructed specifically for teaching reading, but they are part of the child’s world. The child learns of their purpose as well as meaning without learning them formally in the classroom. The teacher should exploit these experiences too in the classroom in creative ways.

Word Cards can also be used to give practice in reading whole sentences. For this kind of activity you will need two sets of Word Cards as shown below:

SET 1

Put your book on the floor
Put your pen in your bag
Put your hand on your head

SET 2

Hold up one card from SET 1 and one card from SET 2. Read the complete sentence pointing to the words. For example, “Look, it says, Put-your-book-on-the-floor”. Ask the class to do what it says. Show the other cards in the same way. Now hold the cards up again, in different combinations. This time, do not say anything, but give all the students a chance to read the cards silently and do what they say.

The aim of this activity is the same as that of ‘Look and Say’ - children have to look at words, this time in sentences, and understand what they mean. The use of words cards makes it easy to change different parts of the sentence and so make different combinations. Instead of holding the cards yourself, you can also ask two or three students to come to the front of the class and hold them so that you are free to point to the message on the word cards.

Besides these activities, there are many other ways of checking the children’s understanding and giving them a reason to read. For example, you can ask them to match sentences with pictures, match halves of sentences together, or draw pictures from sentences. These are simple reading tasks. You can also teach the decoding skills using class readers or a big book. One way is to put flaps over some words or parts of words and ask children to guess what is beneath the flaps. The children naturally use the context to derive meaning from print. They predict and test their predictions by asking themselves if the words they have guessed make sense in context.

Another way is to prepare word and sentence cards to accompany the text of the book. Children match the cards with words and sentences in the text. You can also prepare a cut-up sentence version of the text – you can cut apart key story sentences to highlight chunks of meaning of the natural phrasing units (i.e., sense groups) people use in speaking. Children reconstruct the story based on their understanding of sight, sound and meaning.

Besides, reading sentences helps children to recognise words, because they can guess them from the context. So it is useful to give children practice in reading and understanding complete sentences even at the early stages. Giving students sentences to look at and understand, not merely words, will give them more useful practice in reading than asking them to repeat written sentences aloud over and over again or getting them to ‘spell out’ words.

When we read our own language, we do not need to distinguish every single letter; if we did, we would only be able to read very slowly. When we read fluently, we do not ever read word by word – our eyes move rapidly across whole sentences. However, when children begin to read an unfamiliar script, they may feel that they need to look at individual letters and try to ‘match’ the word with the way it sounds.

However, in English this is quite difficult because the relationship between sound and spelling is very complex. For example, by, buy, light, lie, and island all have the same sound but different spellings. Similarly the letter ‘e’ has a different sound in father, yet, be and pale. We cannot possibly teach all these relationships – even for the commonest words there are several rules – and we do not need to teach them. Children can gradually become aware of the relationships as they read. Nevertheless, children can profit from some attention to the ways speech sounds are represented on paper, and the teacher can help them by drawing attention to sound-spelling relationship from time to time.
Thus, in the very early stages, teachers are concerned, necessarily, with developing the mechanical reading skills such as the recognition of letters and words in print. However, the teacher should move on as quickly as possible to practising the different types of reading activity and to developing the cognitive skills associated with those activities. The earlier the students begin this kind of work even at the elementary level, the more efficient readers they are likely to become soon. For this purpose, texts of different kinds can be used in the classroom.

(For details of Reading at the Elementary stage you may have a look at Course 4.)

Using a Text

The most important thing about using a text for developing reading skills is to decide what you expect the students to be able to do with the text. Do you want ‘full’ comprehension or do you want them just to have a general understanding? Do you want them to retrieve some specific information for a purpose or do you want to give further practice of a specific language item?

We read most efficiently when we either need to or want to read. In the real world, the need is created naturally by circumstances. In the more artificial situation of the classroom, however, the teacher has to create specific needs for specific purposes.

1. General Guidelines

a) One way of creating the need to read a text is to relate the reading to the performance of another task such as note-making or information transfer.

b) To help focus attention and to give students a purpose, give out questions (you may write them on the board) which students have to answer when they are exposed to the text. Remember to make sure that these questions serve the intended purpose.

c) You can create motivation by working on one section of a text before revealing the next. You can ask students what they think the writer is likely to say in the next section, what will happen next, etc.

d) Even if your comprehension questions are properly structured, it will be a dull activity for the students if you simply read through them from a lesson plan. You need to be sensitive and flexible enough to change direction - to skip a few questions if you find they are not necessary, or think of a few additional or supplementary questions with weaker learners.

e) Comprehension questions should be organised and serve a clearly thought-out purpose - they should not be asked at random. You should ask yourself: “What do I want the students to understand? What is this question really asking?” Generally, you should ask ‘gist’ question before you ask ‘detail’ questions, ‘easy’ before ‘difficult’, ‘factual’ before ‘inferential or evaluative’ and questions requiring short answers before those requiring long answers. But mix them up and vary the types.

f) Very often teacher ask questions after a text only to determine how far the students have understood it. It is worth focusing attention on improving the skill itself through questions which lead students towards the main ideas of the text by forcing them to go back to the text frequently and search for meaning. In this process, students are constantly pressed to substantiate their answers with evidence from the text.

g) It is good to vary the classroom activities and the types of questions asked according to: i) the aim of the lesson, ii) the stage of lesson and the level or type of understanding you expect, and iii) the capability of your students at any given point. Sometimes, you may even try to make the students frame questions. Try to deal with different sections of a text in different ways.

h) Although you may occasionally read the text aloud or get a few students to do it, you must provide ample opportunities to the students for silent reading. Training in reading aloud may be given only after the students have sufficiently understood the text.
i) As far as possible, students must be encouraged to guess the meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions from the context. This will help them acquire vocabulary in a meaningful way. At the primary level, visual clues such as pictures could be provided to help in this process. A glossary, if it is provided, should be selective and include only those words and expressions for which no help is available in the text for students to arrive at their meaning.

j) If you have to handle a long text in the class, try to deal with it in several short sections. Students generally shy away from a long text even if it is not difficult. By handling a text in sections, you can ensure a more thorough understanding. This is because, when the first section has been understood, it helps the students to interpret the second, and so on. In this way, interpretation of later sections builds on the understanding of the earlier sections. Besides, it is easier to hold the students' interest in a short section and work thoroughly than on a long text. You can also vary your approach with different sections, thus providing for variety in classroom activities.

k) A text can be used as a source of several follow-up activities. Consider whether it could provide the basis for a role-play, a discussion, a debate, or some useful written work. You can put questions of evaluation (of ideas, arguments, bias, character, significance of the title, etc.) and personal response (agree/disagree, like/dislike, etc.- why ?), and help the students to relate the content of the text to their own experience or knowledge. You also make them reconsider the hypotheses they had made about the text in the early stages.

2. Introducing the Text

Many teachers feel that they must introduce every text elaborately (often through a phrase in the vernacular language) before allowing the students to start work on it. While an introduction can certainly be helpful, it may not always be necessary. The purpose of the introduction is to get the students interested in reading the particular text and guiding them in the right direction.

An introduction will not serve the purpose and will be a waste of time if it.
a) is too long,
b) gives away too much of the content of the text,
c) is irrelevant, thereby confusing the students by raising misleading expectations about the text, or
d) is a monologue by the teacher without any student involvement.

A good introduction, therefore,
a) is usually short,
b) does not tell the students anything that they can find out for themselves by reading the text,
c) makes the students want to read the text,
d) helps the students to relate the text to their own interests, experiences, and aims, and
e) involves the students actively by means of questioning.

This can be done in two ways:
i) By giving a few questions for students to think about as they read and discussing the answers afterwards - these are called 'guiding questions' or 'signpost questions'.

ii) By organising an activity before students read a text, which arouses their interest in the topic and makes them want to read. Such activities are called 'pre-reading activities' or 'pre-reading tasks'.

Examples of pre-reading activities
i) You are going to read about an earthquake. What would you like to know about the earthquake? Write down at least five questions, which you hope the text will answer.
You are going to read about an earthquake. Try to imagine what the text will tell you about: buildings, people, boats, trains, hills around the city, etc.

You are going to read a text about an earthquake. Here are some words and phrases from the text. Can you guess how they are used in the text? Tremors, the Richter scale, massive shocks, huge wave, etc.

You are going to read about an earthquake. Have you seen or read about an earthquake? Was there an earthquake in India in recent times? What do you know about it?

3. Suggested Activities

A few examples of activities or tasks are given below. You may think of many more creative ways of developing the various reading abilities in your students.

Skimming for gist
a) Stating the main idea of a selection or finding the sentence that gives the main idea.
b) Reading through a text and then selecting a suitable title from among three or four titles suggested, or from a list of sentences, one that expresses the main idea of the text.
c) Reading through a passage and then suggesting a suitable title for it.
d) Matching different text titles to a series of short texts within a given time limit.
e) Matching different topic phrases or sentences to a series of short paragraphs in a given passage.

Scanning for specific information
a) Scanning a passage and underlining or circling the required information in a given time limit.
b) Going through a set of pre-reading questions focusing on specific information and scanning the passage for such information.

Making predictions
These activities are not only useful in developing students’ predictive abilities, but also in stimulating their interest in the reading text.

a) Making hypotheses or predictions about what the text is likely to deal with, based on the title alone or the title of the book from which the text is taken.
b) Discussing the topic of the text or lesson beforehand, based on previous knowledge and experience.
c) Indicating which of a series of questions listed by the teacher are likely to be answered in a given selection and then checking the responses after reading the selection.
d) Stating questions the student would expect to find answered in a given selection and then checking to find the answers during or after reading the selection.
e) After reading a section of the text anticipating or predicting what is likely to happen next.
f) Making up possible endings for stories.

Reading for detail
a) Indicating which of a series of ideas listed are brought out in a given selection.
b) Indicating which of a series of details support the main idea of a selection.
c) Completing sentences with relevant details from the reading text.
d) Matching a series of details with a list of main ideas.
e) Showing through outlinking the relationship between details and the main points.
f) Indicating which details belong and which do not, in an outline that has been made
g) Preparing charts, tables, graphs, etc. based on the material read.

h) Deciding which details are important in terms of a stated purpose.

i) Making a list of details that occur in a story as preparation for dramatising the story.

Understanding the organization of a text

a) Putting the jumbled paragraphs of a reading text in the correct order - before they can sequence them correctly, students have to understand what is happening in the text. Variation: Giving each student a different paragraph and asking him/her to find out, through discussion, what the others in his/her group have and sequence the paragraphs.

b) Deciding which of several summaries best summarises a selection.

c) Discussing the function of particular paragraphs.

d) Dividing a long text into two or three sections which reflect the organization of the text.

e) Making notes on the text - filling in main topics and sub-topics of a selection in a framework suggested; placing sub-topics given in a mixed up order under a list of main topics specification making an outline of points in selection on one's own.

f) "Jigsaw texts" : Giving individual students or groups of students slightly different texts concerning a single event so that they have to exchange information with each other before some final task can be completed.

Understanding the relationship between sentences, clauses and phrases

a) Rearranging jumbled sentences or parts of scrambled sentences.

b) Sorting out jumbled sentences from two stories and rearranging the sentences in each story the right sequence.

c) Indicating which sentences in a series mean almost the same as the sentences specified.

d) Listing the sentences in a selection that helps prove a given point.

e) Interpreting the meaning of conjunctions or cohesive linkers pronouns, and prepositions they are used in a text.

f) Supplying the logical connectors that are omitted from a passage.

g) Establishing the relation in meaning among the parts of a sentence.

h) Studying the relationships of sentences within a paragraph.

(The table and the tasks that follow have been adapted from Mike Beaumount, "Reading in a foreign language at an elementary level" in A. Matthews, M. Spratt and L. Dangerfield eds. At The Chalkface, London : Edward Arnold, 1985).

For the purposes of illustration, some activity types are suggested below, which imply a range of techniques for developing the reading skills at the elementary level.

Consider the tabular information given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>windows</th>
<th>rooms</th>
<th>trees</th>
<th>gate</th>
<th>door</th>
<th>roof</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussein</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Information transfer**

From this, students can write six short paragraphs, each paragraph containing slightly different information.

**Example:** James’s house has two windows and two rooms. It has a green door and a green roof. It has two trees in the garden and a red garden gate.

Students can be asked to write the other five paragraphs. They can even be asked to complete the sentences in a couple of paragraphs, like these:

a) Sharad’s house has _______ windows and one _______. It has a _______ door and a _______ roof. It has _______ trees in the garden and a _______ garden gate.

b) _______ house has one room and one window. It has a _______ door and a red _______. It has one _______ in the garden and a _______ garden gate.

The student can also be asked to colour the pictures of the six houses suitably, writing the name of the child in a box in each picture.

**Skimming**

Read the paragraphs and write one word. There are _______ children how many?

Each paragraph is about a _______.

Find two numbers. What are they? _______ _______.

Find two colours. What are they? _______ _______.

(By completing this task, the students show that they have a good idea of the content of the six paragraphs or the tabular information.)

**Scanning**

Write a child’s name. Do it as quickly as possible.

His house has one window and a red roof _______.

Her house has one tree and a green roof _______.

etc.

Write a colour. Do it as quickly as possible.

Hussein’s house has a _______ garden gate.

Arthi’s house has a _______ door.

**Matching**

Match the picture given below with the children.

(The pictures of the six houses are drawn, but not in the order of the names given in the Table.)

Write the child’s name under each picture and colour the pictures.

**Making inferences**

Write a child’s name in each box.

His favourite colour is green. _______.

His favourite colour is red. _______.

Her house is very warm. _______.

His house is very airy. _______.

(The teacher should ask the students to justify their responses, using language similar to that of the text as well as their own previous knowledge and experiences about warmth or airiness.)
You may think of other ways of exploiting this material for reading.

For example, you may ask comprehension questions based on the tabular information, like, 'How many children have houses with two rooms?'

But you must not forget that every reading task you set your students should have the clear aim of developing one or more of the specific sub-skills of reading like skimming, scanning, or inferencing.

Check Your Progress

Notes:
- a) Write your answers in the space given below.
- b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

17. Explain what is meant by the technique, 'Look and Say'.

18. What types of comprehension questions can be set on a reading text and how are they generally sequenced?

19. What are the characteristics of a good introduction to a reading text?

20. What are 'signpost questions'?

21. What is the value of 'pre-reading tasks'?

12.7 LET US SUM UP

Let us briefly restate the points made in this unit:

Reading is not a general ability but involves a complex set of skills and mental processes, which can be acquired through guided practice in an instructional programme. Efficient readers adapt their approach and speed of reading both to the nature of the material to be read and to their own purpose in reading it.
Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension occurs at four interrelated levels: literal, interpretive, critical, and creative. Teachers must train their students in reading at all these four levels. The overall reading skills comprises: skills involving flexible technique, skills of using non-text information in understanding a text, word-attack skills, and text-attack skills. The basic skills of reading are skimming for gist, scanning for specific information, inferencing and evaluating. The overall aim of a reading development programme is to enable students to read without help unfamiliar, authentic texts at an appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding.

Basically, two kinds of reading can be distinguished: intensive and extensive reading. They involve different classroom procedures as their purposes are basically different. Intensive reading involves examining a text closely and in detail, while extensive reading involves reading fluently in quantity, for enjoyment and without help. Material selected for developing intensive reading skills must be accessible to students linguistically and conceptually. It must be interesting, relevant, and varied, and should represent samples of authentic language use. In the very early stages, teachers are concerned with the mechanical reading skills of decoding letters and words in print, but even then it would be more useful to children if they are given sentences to look at and understand, not merely words. Teachers should exploit children’s early experiences with print, at home and outside, for this purpose.

Materials chosen for extensive reading must be easy, short, appealing in content and presentation, and varied to suit the interests and ability levels of students. At soon as children have acquired these basic skills, the teacher should expose them to different types of reading activity to develop the mental abilities involved in those activities. Certain general guidelines are given for using reading texts in the classroom and a few activities or tasks are also suggested for exploiting the texts. Some of the activity types are illustrated as well.

### 12.8 KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Authentic language</strong></th>
<th>Language used in real-life contexts, not edited or written specially for teaching purposes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creative reading</strong></td>
<td>Generating new ideas, insights, applications, etc. from a text; imaginative reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical reading</strong></td>
<td>Making judgements with regard to a text - about the ideas, implications, organization of information, author’s style etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extensive reading</strong></td>
<td>Reading widely and fluently for enjoyment and without external help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibility</strong></td>
<td>Being able to vary the speed of (in reading) reading according to the nature of the reading material and the reader’s purpose in reading it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information transfer</strong></td>
<td>Transferring some of the relevant information from a verbal text to a graphic format (e.g. table, graph, chart), and vice versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensive reading</strong></td>
<td>Reading a text closely and in detail for a thorough understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretive reading</strong></td>
<td>Understanding the ideas and information not directly stated in a text; reading ‘between the lines’ and making inferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literal reading</strong></td>
<td>Understanding the information stated directly in a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-reading tasks</strong></td>
<td>Activities or tasks which students are required to attempt before they start reading a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scanning</strong></td>
<td>Darting over a text to search for a specific item of information desired, passing over irrelevant information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sight word vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Words that students can recognise and understand on sight without a complicated analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skimming</strong></td>
<td>Glancing rapidly through a text to find out its general content, central idea(s), or gist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Literal, interpretive, critical and creative.

2. Interpreting or inferencing time relationships, geographical relationships, cause and effect, generalizations based on details/facts given, attitudes, emotions and points of view. Select any two and give your own examples.

3. Making judgements about the accuracy of facts, validity of opinions or inferences, effectiveness of style and organisation, etc.

4. Dramatising or role-playing, rewriting from a different point of view, etc.

5. The nature of the text to be read and the reader’s purpose in reading it.

6. **Skimming**: Glancing rapidly through a text to find out its general content, main ideas(s) or gist.

   **Scanning**: Searching for a specific item of information by glossing over irrelevant information.

7. To enable students to read without help unfamiliar, authentic texts at an appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding.

8. **Intensive reading**: Reading a text closely and in detail for a thorough understanding.

   **Extensive reading**: Reading fluently and in large quantity for enjoyment without external help.

9. It complements classroom learning by reinforcing the language learnt already; it motivates the students, and develops in them a positive attitude towards reading in general; it develops the habit of reading faster.

10. (Have you been able to sort them out neatly? Why not? Many of the skills which are developed in the early stages can be further refined at an advanced level in later stages.)

11. Length and complexity of sentence structure and new vocabulary items.

12. Because, in real life, we mostly read things we are interested in.

13. Language used in real life for communication in various contexts which has not been edited or simplified for language teaching purposes.

14. Simple language is language originally written in a way which is easily understood by the students; simplified language is authentic language which is modified and made simpler in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures to suit the level of the students.

15. The extent to which a text lends itself to activities or tasks which would enable the development of reading skills in students.

16. They should be linguistically easy, short, appealing in presentation, and varied to suit the interests and maturity levels of students.

17. Children look at word cards and say the words.

18. ‘Gist’ questions (or global questions), ‘detail’ (or local) questions, factual questions, inferential questions, evaluative questions, question requiring short or long answers.

19. Short; not giving away too much of the content; relevant; involving the students; making them want to read the text.

20. Questions given to students to think about while they read a text; questions that lead the students towards the main ideas of the text.

21. They arouse the interest of students in the topic and make them want to read the text.
12.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

