Chapter One

What is reading?

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

✔ **provide** your own definition of reading.

✔ **identify** reasons why establishing a culture of reading both inside and outside of the classroom is important.

✔ **describe** the differences among bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading.

✔ **explain** intensive and extensive reading and how each can be integrated into a reading curriculum.

✔ **identify** reading strategies that language learners can use to improve their reading.

✔ **describe** why the assessment of reading is important to the successful teaching of reading.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this book is to provide you with an opportunity to think about techniques and strategies to improve the teaching of reading to students of **English as a Second Language (ESL)** or **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**. Each chapter of the book will provide helpful suggestions that you can use in the classroom to engage learners in meaningful ways to improve their reading.

This chapter will focus on the concept of reading. We will first answer the question, *What is reading?* The importance of establishing a culture of reading will then be discussed. We will explore the concepts of bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading. Next, we will explore intensive and extensive reading and identify how both can be integrated into a reading curriculum. This discussion will be followed by identifying the importance of reading strategies that language learners can use to improve their reading. Finally, we will discuss how to balance the teaching and assessment of reading.

Keep in mind that the overall goal of this book is to be a guide and a resource to you as a teacher to make the teaching of reading more accessible. Whether you are teaching reading as a separate skill, teaching reading as part of an integrated skills approach, or teaching a **content area** in which students engage in reading, this book will give you ideas for how to help the students you work with to be better readers. You will learn very specific things that you can do to be more confident about teaching reading.

2. What is reading?

Write a short definition of reading on the lines below. Underline key words in your definition that you feel are essential to understanding what reading is.

_____

_____

_____

Share your definition with a classmate or colleague.

_____

Reading can be defined simply as making meaning from print. Four key elements combine in the process of making meaning from print: the reader, the text, reading strategies, and fluency. Reading is a process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to

build meaning. Meaning does not rest in the reader nor does it rest in the text. The reader's background knowledge integrates with the text to create the meaning. The goal of reading is comprehension. **Fluent reading** is defined as the ability to read at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension. **Strategic reading** is defined as the ability of the reader to use a wide variety of reading strategies to accomplish a purpose for reading. Good strategic readers know what to do when they encounter difficulties. The text, the reader, strategies, and fluency together define the act of reading. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the definition of reading.
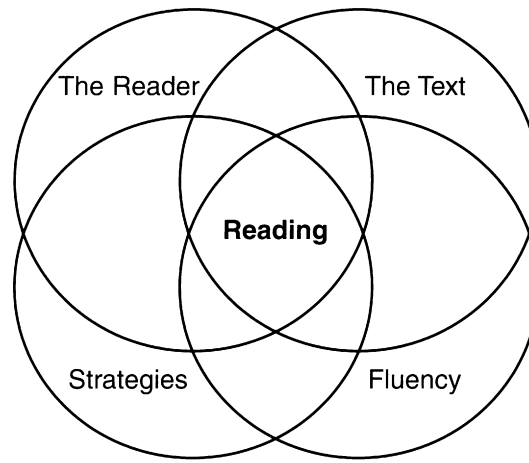

Figure 1: The definition of reading

Notice that the intersection of all four circles represents reading. This is the point where meaningful reading happens. Grabe (1991) points out the complexity of even defining reading by stating that "a description of reading has to account for the notions that fluent reading is rapid, purposeful, interactive, comprehending, flexible, and gradually developing" (p. 378).

Meaning is at the core of what reading is. If no meaning is communicated then something other than reading is happening. There is an expectation that when we read, we will do something with what we have read. For example, we will place a phone call to the correct telephone number because we have found the number in the telephone book. Or we will talk to a family member or a friend about something that we have read. We will write a report based on information we have collected through reading. We will simply read to receive pleasure. No matter the outcome, we should remember that there is a reason why we are reading.

Teaching reading usually has at least two aspects. In one aspect, it can refer to teaching children who are learning to read in their first language for the very first time. (This book will not focus on literacy instruction. Please refer to Chapter 4 of *Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners* for information on teaching reading to young native and non-native learners of

English (Linse, 2005).) A second aspect of teaching reading refers to teaching learners who already have reading skills in their first language. Like learning how to ride a bicycle, you only have to learn to read once. Once you have learned how to read in one language, you do not learn how to read again in a second or foreign language. Rather you need to learn how to transfer skills that you have already learned in your first language to new reading contexts in a new language.

Compare the definition of reading that you wrote on page 2 with the definition given in this section. What elements of your definition are contained in the definition given? What elements of your definition are *not* contained in the definition given? What changes (if any) would you make in your definition now? Rewrite your definition below.

_____

_____

_____

Share your new definition with a classmate or colleague.

_____

Establishing a culture of reading

As I entered my ESL reading class one day, my Mexican students wanted to share a joke that they had made up. They asked, "When you're on a beach in Mexico (or any place in the world), how do you know who the Americans are?" I suggested answers like the color of the skin or the use of English. The response was "No, no, teacher! The Americans are reading books and the Mexicans are not." They found it humorous to make fun of their own culture.

In many places of the world, reading is not an integral part of people's lives. As teachers, one of our goals should be to excite our students so that they will want to read. Our students should see from our enthusiasm that gaining information and knowledge from reading is an important part of our lives.

I believe that there are three reasons why we should consider the importance of establishing a culture of reading. First, much of the information available in the world comes in the format of print. Most of the printed materials in the world come in English. In order to help students access more of the information available in English, the teacher must establish a culture of reading.

Next, reading strengthens other areas of learning. For the second language learners we work with, this means that reading can strengthen the learning of writing, listening, and speaking. If you read well, you then have something to talk and write about. You can listen to others talk about the

subject as well. Also, reading is a way to learn new information as you read content area material. As you learn new things through reading, you improve your overall learning.

Finally, establishing a culture of reading can lead to increased critical thinking skills. If you talk to people who read a lot, they often read many different opinions on a topic. They are able to sift through arguments and arrive at a position because they have critically developed their ideas.

Reflection

Do you believe that you currently teach or will be teaching in a program that has a well-established culture of reading? Why or why not? What could you do as a teacher of reading to help build or strengthen a culture of reading where you teach?

Share your answers with a classmate or colleague.

Bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading

Bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading are names of different theoretical models that researchers use to describe how people process print. We will review each of these models and gain an understanding of why an interactive process is the best representation of how people read.

Bottom-up models consist of lower-level reading processes. Students start with the fundamental basics of letter and sound recognition, which in turn allows them to move up to morpheme recognition followed by word recognition, building up to the identification of grammatical structures, sentences, and longer texts. Understanding letters, letter clusters, words, phrases, sentences, longer text, and finally meaning is the order in achieving comprehension. With the bottom-up model, students start from the bottom (letters and sounds) to get to the top (comprehension).

A **phonics approach** to teaching reading supports a bottom-up model. Phonics focuses on learning individual letters and sounds rather than learning a word as a whole unit. This approach is used in many reading series. Many teachers and researchers suggest that for readers to be successful, they must be able to break a word down into its smallest parts, the individual sounds. When readers come to an unknown word, they can sound out the word because of the knowledge of the individual units that make up the word. The blending together of the various sounds allows readers to then move toward comprehension. Teachers must remember that phonics is a method, *not* the goal for teaching reading. Cummins (2003) emphasizes that "the purpose of phonics instruction should be to facilitate access to and comprehension of meaningful print" (p. 18). This means that our goal is not to teach phonics

but to use phonics as a method to develop readers' bottom-up skills, leading to comprehension of the material being read.

One element of a bottom-up approach to reading is that the pedagogy recommends a graded-reader approach. All reading material is carefully reviewed so that students are not exposed to vocabulary that contains sounds that they have not yet been introduced to.

Figure 2 is a graphic representation of a bottom-up approach to reading. The reader begins with the smallest elements and builds up to comprehension of what is being read.
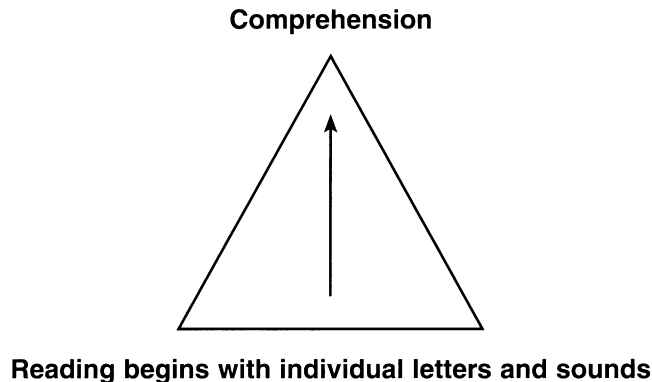
Comprehension

Reading begins with individual letters and sounds

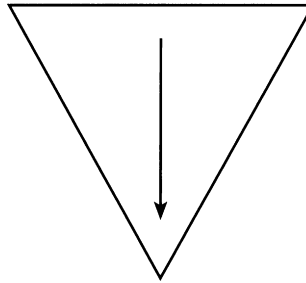**Figure 2:** A bottom-up approach to reading

Top-down reading, on the other hand, begins with the idea that comprehension resides in the reader. The reader uses background knowledge, makes predictions, and searches the text to confirm or reject the predictions that are made. Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out that in a top-down model of reading, comprehension is directed by the reader's goals and expectations. A reading passage can thus be understood even if not all of the individual words are understood. Within a top-down approach to reading, the teacher focuses on meaning-generating activities rather than on mastery of the bottom-up skills of letter, sound, and word recognition.

Goodman (1976), one of the original advocates of top-down models of reading, criticizes bottom-up models because the readers become "word callers," people who can read the words on the page but do not understand what they have read. Goodman believes that teachers make learning to read difficult "by breaking whole (natural) language into bite-sized, abstract little pieces" (p. 7). I agree somewhat with him. For example, I can read Spanish and pronounce all of the words that I'm reading correctly, and yet depending on what I am reading, I may have no comprehension of what I have read.

A meaning-based approach or a whole-language approach to reading is supportive of top-down models of reading. Four key features highlight a meaning-based or whole-language approach to teaching reading. First, it is a literature-based approach. Books are used which contain authentic language. Readers are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary. Next, whole language is student-centered with the focus on individual readers choosing what they want to read. Third, reading is integrated with writing. Classes work on both skills simultaneously. Finally, emphasis is on constructing meaning. The focus is on meaning and keeping the language whole, as opposed to breaking it down into smaller units. Whole language is an approach, *not* the goal. The goal is reading comprehension. One possible way to help students understand their reading is to use a whole-language approach to teaching.

Figure 3 is a graphic representation of a top-down approach to reading. The reader begins with the largest elements and works down towards smaller elements to build comprehension of what is being read.

**Reading begins with reader background knowledge**

Comprehension

Figure 3: A top-down approach to reading

The approach that is accepted as the most comprehensive description of the reading process is an **interactive approach**. This third type combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. The best readers in any language are those who combine elements of both. For example, most readers begin reading by using top-down reading strategies until there is a problem, and then they shift to bottom-up strategies. Have you ever read something quickly and suddenly come to several new words? You are required to slow down your reading to decode the new words. When you do this, you are using bottom-up strategies to understand the words.

Figure 4 is a graphic representation of an interactive approach to reading. The reader combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down models of reading to reach comprehension.

Reader background knowledge

Comprehension
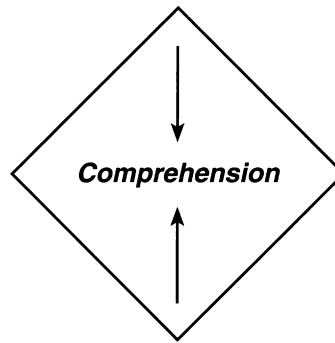
Knowledge of individual letters and sounds

Figure 4: An interactive approach to reading

Reflection

If you have studied a second language, can you identify the approach to the teaching of reading that was used when you learned to read in that language? If you currently teach a class, can you identify the approach to the teaching of reading that is used in your program? Is the approach a bottom-up one? Top-down? Or interactive? What is it about your program that leads you to your decision? What could you do to strengthen an interactive approach to teaching reading? If you are not yet teaching, think of a program you are familiar with. Is the approach to reading a bottom-up, top-down, or interactive approach?

Share your answers with a classmate or colleague.

Intensive and extensive reading

Reading is best developed through reading and not through talking about reading. Two basic approaches are used for teaching reading: **intensive reading** and **extensive reading**. The differences between intensive and extensive reading are important for teachers to understand. Intensive reading is the teaching of reading skills, vocabulary, and phonological instruction, typically through short reading passages followed by reading comprehension exercises. Extensive reading is reading of longer passages with a focus on enjoyment and/or learning new information while reading. There is typically no accountability required during extensive reading.

A bottom-up approach to reading would be considered part of intensive reading. Teachers would focus classroom time on learning individual

letters and sounds and provide many practice opportunities for the learners. Extensive reading plays a key role in top-down approaches to reading. Extensive reading means reading many books (or longer segments of text) without focusing on classroom exercises that may test comprehension skills.

An interactive approach to reading would include aspects of both intensive and extensive reading. As teachers, we need to provide learners with shorter passages to explicitly teach specific reading skills. We also need to encourage learners to read longer texts without an emphasis on testing their skills. Extensive reading provides opportunities to practice skills introduced during intensive reading instruction, and it can lead to increased enjoyment of reading.

Teachers should be aware that a single classroom textbook will not meet the needs for both intensive and extensive instruction. Materials will need to be selected that engage the learners in both types of reading.

Figure 5 outlines a way that we can view the relationships between intensive and extensive reading.
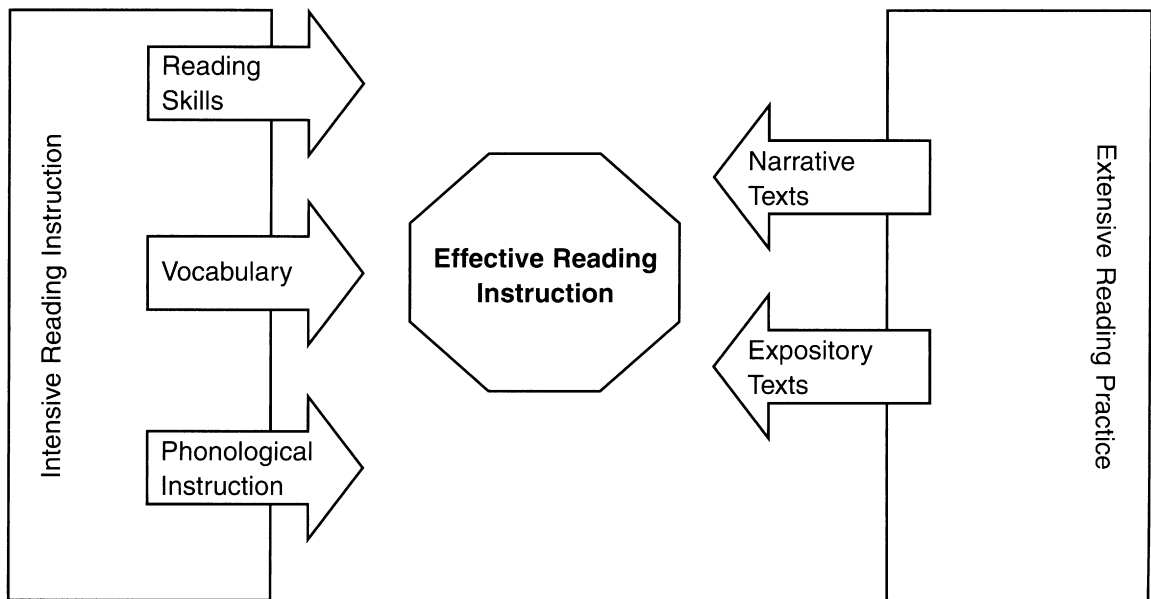

Figure 5: The integration of intensive and extensive reading

Note that during intensive reading instruction, teachers can explicity teach reading skills and vocabulary and provide phonological instruction so that learners have the tools to read effectively. Then learners read extensively in order to practice their developing reading skills with longer texts. By combining both intensive and extensive reading in the same program, more effective reading instruction can occur.

Write three advantages to establishing a reading curriculum that includes both intensive and extensive reading opportunities for the learners.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Share your list with a classmate or colleague.

Reflection

With a classmate or colleague, discuss any disadvantages or challenges you see in establishing a reading program that includes both intensive and extensive reading opportunities for learners.

Reading strategies

Perhaps one aspect of teaching reading that teachers might know about, but often do not know how to do, is the explicit teaching of **reading strategies**. Perceptive second-language readers are those who are aware of and use appropriate reading strategies for learning in a second language. The purpose of teaching reading strategies is to improve comprehension while reading. Strategies are the *conscious* actions that readers take to improve their **reading skills**. Strategies may be mental but observable, such as observing someone taking notes while reading to recall information better, or strategies may be mental and unobservable, such as thinking about what one already knows on a topic before reading a passage. Because strategies are conscious, there is active involvement of the reader in their selection and use.

Strategies are not isolated actions, but rather a process of orchestrating more than one action to accomplish an **L2**–second language–task. It may be helpful to view strategy use as an orchestra. An instrument sounds good alone, but when combined with other instruments, a much stronger, more glorious sound results. Although we can identify individual strategies, rarely will one strategy be used in isolation. Strategies are related to each other and must be viewed as a part of a process, not as a single action. Also, it is important to understand that we do not categorize strategies as good or bad, but rather it is the implementation and use of the strategies that are considered good or bad.

Perhaps you are familiar with various learning strategy inventories that are available such as Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL). The SILL is perhaps the most widely used strategy inventory for language learning. Teachers in many countries of the world use this inventory as a tool in raising the awareness of language learning strategies. The SILL contains 50 items and provides learners with a profile of strategy use in six areas: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2001) have developed the *Language Strategy Use Survey*. This survey includes revised items from the SILL as well as strategies identified and described in Cohen's (1990) *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*, and those included in Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, and Lassegard, (2002) *Maximizing Study Abroad*. Like the SILL, the *Language Strategy Use Survey* can serve as a tool to raise awareness of strategy use. The major difference between the SILL and the survey is that the *Language Strategy Use Survey* focuses on the use of strategies in specific language skills. The survey asks learners to rate their strategy use in six specific sections: listening strategies, vocabulary strategies, speaking strategies, reading strategies, writing strategies, and translation strategies.

An additional inventory that shows great promise is a more recent instrument developed by Mokhtari and reported in Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001). The *Survey of Reading Strategies* (SORS) focuses on **metacognitive strategy** use within the context of reading. The SORS measures three categories of reading strategies: global reading strategies (e.g., having a purpose for reading, using context to guess unfamiliar vocabulary, confirming or rejecting your predictions), problem-solving strategies (e.g., adjusting reading rate, focusing when concentration is lost), and support strategies (e.g., taking notes while reading, highlighting important ideas in the text). Since it has just recently been completed, more studies need to be conducted using this instrument in order to better understand the use of specific strategies in ESL and EFL contexts.

I use the SORS as a tool to introduce learners to the concept of reading strategies. The inventory helps make readers more aware of the kinds of strategies that good readers use. By introducing strategies at the beginning of the semester, I'm then able to integrate the explicit teaching of strategies throughout the rest of the semester. In Chapters 2–5, we will discuss how to effectively introduce the teaching of strategies to help learners be effective readers.

The *Survey of Reading Strategies* (SORS) is in Appendix 1 (pages 155–158). Please respond to the questions to get a profile of your reading strategies. Then complete the questions below.

1. What do you learn about yourself as a strategic reader from your SORS profile?

_____

_____

_____

2. How could you use the SORS with second-language readers?

_____

_____

_____

Share your responses with a classmate or colleague.

Assessing reading

The assessment of reading is vital in order to help learners see the progress that they are making. Assessing growth and development in reading skills from both a formal and an informal perspective requires time and training. Formal assessments are often **quantitative** in nature. For example, a formal assessment of reading would be a reading comprehension test in which the students are graded on the percentage of correct answers. Many intensive reading books available commercially have a reading passage followed by comprehension questions. This type of feedback to the learner is useful in giving them information about how well they are reading.

Qualitative assessments include assessments that do not result in a numerical score. Reading interest surveys, reading strategy surveys (such as the SORS referred to earlier in this chapter), interviews, journal responses, and portfolios are examples of qualitative assessments. Qualitative assessment activities should also be included in the reading classroom. In each of the chapters that follow, we will identify appropriate ways to assess reading both qualitatively and quantitatively.
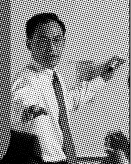
Respond to the following multiple-choice questions about issues discussed in this chapter. This is an example of a formal, quantitative assessment of your understanding of key issues discussed in this chapter.

1. What are the four key elements needed to make meaning from print?
   A. The reader, content, culture, and fluency
   B. The text, top-down processes, bottom-up processes, and interactive processes
   C. Strategies, fluency, the text, and the reader
   D. Fluency, content, interactive processes, and intensive reading

2. Which of the following is **not** one of the reasons given in this chapter for establishing a culture of reading?
   A. Reading helps students enjoy life.
   B. To access printed material
   C. Reading strengthens other areas of learning.
   D. To increase critical thinking skills

3. Which graphic best represents an interactive model for reading?

   A.

   B.

   C.

   D.
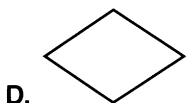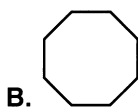
4. Intensive reading focuses on the following aspects of reading:
   A. Effective reading instruction with many opportunities to read
   B. Reading skills, vocabulary, and phonological instruction
   C. Narrative and expository texts to expose readers to variety
   D. All of the above

5. What is the purpose of teaching reading strategies?
   A. To improve reading comprehension
   B. To help readers be more perceptive
   C. To help readers be conscious of their learning
   D. To gather research data to improve teaching

Respond to the following reading journal prompts. This is an example of an informal, qualitative assessment of your understanding of key issues discussed in this chapter.

1. Identify five things that you have learned in this chapter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. How will the information in this chapter help you to be a better second-language teacher?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. How can you use the *Further Readings* and the *Helpful Websites* listed below to help you learn more about improving your teaching skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Share your answers with a classmate or colleague.

3. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to focus on the concept of reading and to introduce a number of factors to consider when we are deciding how it can be taught. We first addressed the question, *What is reading?* We identified that the text, the reader, strategies, and fluency combine to define the act of reading. The importance of establishing a culture of reading was also discussed. We then explored the concepts of bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading. Next, we examined intensive and extensive reading and identified how both can be integrated into a reading curriculum. We also discussed how reading strategies play a central role to successful reading. Finally, we identified the importance of balancing both the teaching and assessment of reading. Each of these ideas will be considered in more depth in the next three chapters.

Further Readings

Volumes of material have been written about how to teach second-language reading. Publications that I have found particularly useful include:

Anderson, N. J. 1999. *Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and strategies.* Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

In this book, I outline an approach to reading based around the acronym ACTIVE: activate prior knowledge, cultivate vocabulary, teach for comprehension, increase reading rate, verify strategies, and evaluate progress. Helpful suggestions are provided for teachers to implement an active approach to reading instruction.

Bamford, J. and R. Day. 2004. *Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

This book provides over 100 practical activities that teachers can use in the classroom to encourage extensive reading. The book is divided into 13 sections: (1) getting started, (2) introducing reading material, (3) motivating and supporting reading, (4) monitoring reading, (5) evaluating reading, (6) oral reading reports, (7) drama and role plays, (8) having fun, (9) written reading reports, (10) writing creatively, (11) developing awareness in reading, (12) increasing reading rate, and (13) developing and consolidating vocabulary. The book ends with a useful section on the 12 most frequently asked questions about extensive reading.

Brown, J. D. 2005. *Testing in language programs: A comprehensive guide to English language assessment. (New edition).* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

This book approaches essential testing principles in a way that can help all teachers write strong language assessments. The 11 chapters cover: types and uses of tests; adopting, adapting, and developing language tests; developing good-quality

language test items; item analysis in language testing; describing language test results; interpreting language test scores; correlation in language testing; language test reliability; language test dependability; language test validity; and language testing in reality.

Grabe, W. and F. Stoller. 2002. *Teaching and Researching Reading.* New York, NY: Pearson Education.

Grabe and Stoller provide useful information for both teachers and researchers interested in second-language reading. The 10 chapters are divided into four sections: understanding L2 reading, exploring research in reading, researching reading in the classroom, and resources.

Hudson, T. 2007. *Teaching second language reading.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

This new book by Hudson covers several issues of importance to teachers of reading. The book includes chapters on theories and models of first language reading processes, second and foreign language reading issues, reading skills, strategies and metacognitive skills, content schema and background knowledge, formal schema and second language reading, genre and contrastive rhetoric, vocabulary in second language reading, reading and writing relationships, and teaching issues.

Koda, K. 2005. *Insights into Second Language Reading.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

This book is theoretically based, examining models for both first- and second-language reading. Koda's work provides one of the best written books to examine the theories of reading. In particular she identifies new directions for research into the complex processes of second-language reading. Readers who are interested in doing research related to second-language reading should read this book.

Helpful Websites

Extensive Reading (www.extensivereading.net/)

This is a very useful site to learn more about extensive reading. The site provides links to many articles that are accessible online about different aspects of extensive reading.

Language Strategy Use Survey (www.carla.umn.edu/about/profiles/CohenPapers/Lg_Strat_Srvy.pdf)

Cohen, Oxford, and Chi's (2001) *Language Strategy Use Survey* is available online. The survey includes revised items from Oxford's *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* as well as strategies identified and described in Cohen's (1990) *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*, and those included in Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, and Lassegard, *Maximizing Study Abroad.*
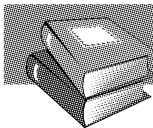
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Cohen, A. D. 1990. *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers.* New York, NY: Newbury House Publishers.

Cohen, A. D., R. L. Oxford, and J. C. Chi. 2001. *Language Strategy Use Survey.* Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota.

Cummins, J. 2003. Reading and the Bilingual Student: Fact and friction. In G.G. Garcia (Ed.) *English Learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy* (pp. 2–33). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Goodman, K. 1976. Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. In H. Singer and R.B. Ruddell (Eds.) *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading,* 2nd ed. (pp. 497–508). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Grabe, W. 1991. Current Developments in Second Language Reading Research. *TESOL Quarterly, 25,* 375–406.

Linse, C. T. 2005. *Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners.* New York. NY: McGraw Hill.

Mokhtari, K., and R. Sheorey. 2002. Measuring ESL Students' Awareness of Reading Strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education, 25*(3), 2–10.

Oxford, R. L. 1990. *Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know.* New York, NY: Newbury House Publishers.

Paige, R. M., A. D. Cohen, B. Kappler, J. C. Chi and J. P. Lassegard. 2002. *Maximizing Study Abroad: A student's guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use.* Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

Sheorey, R. and K. Mokhtari. 2001. Differences in the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies among Native and Non-native Readers. *System, 29,* 431–449.

Answers to the multiple-choice quiz from page 13.

1. C	**2.** A	**3.** D	**4.** B	**5.** A

Correct answers	Percentage
5	100%
4	80%
3	60%
2	40%
1	20%
0	0%

Chapter Two

Reading for beginning level learners

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

✔ **describe** how reading is typically taught to learners at beginning levels of language proficiency.

✔ **explain** the differences between teaching reading and testing reading comprehension.

✔ **identify** reading strategies appropriate for beginning level readers.

✔ **recognize** principles of teaching beginning level readers.

✔ **explain** five different purposes for assessment: placement tests, diagnostic tests, progress tests, achievement tests, and learner self-assessment.

1. Introduction

In the *Practical English Language Teaching* series, the level of language proficiency (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) is used as the organizing framework. In this volume, we will refer to descriptors developed within the Common European Framework (CEF) for teaching reading (Council of Europe, 2001). In terms of describing the teaching of reading, the CEF has three levels: basic user (beginning), independent user (intermediate), and proficient user (advanced). Each of these three levels is further subdivided into two levels. The label *Basic user* is subdivided into levels A1, referred to as the *Breakthrough* level and A2, referred to as the *Waystage* level. In this chapter, we will address the issues dealing with this first stage of English language proficiency and ways to teach reading.

In this book, we do not address the issues of teaching initial literacy skills to second language (L2) readers. As it is addressed here, beginning level readers are readers that are literate in their first language but are at the beginning stages of learning to read in English. *Beginning* refers to a level of language proficiency and not a beginning reader. In second language learning contexts, we also often use the term **false beginners** to refer to learners who are not beginning initial reading instruction. They have received minimal instruction in English and have some reading ability but are still at a beginning level of English language proficiency. You will see from the CEF descriptors below that we will refer primarily to false beginners in this chapter.

It is very important to understand that the way a learner at the beginning level of language proficiency is defined in one language program may be different from the way that you define it. In Chapter 3, we will address how to teach reading to independent users, and in Chapter 4, we will look at ways to improve teaching to proficient users.

In Section 2 of this chapter, we will look at **syllabus** design issues in teaching reading. In Section 3, we will examine principles that can guide the teaching of reading to beginners. This will be followed in Section 4 with an examination of appropriate tasks and materials for beginning level learners. Section 5 will allow us to address issues of teaching reading inside and outside of the classroom. The role of assessment with readers who are at the beginning level of language proficiency is addressed in Section 6.

Reflection

Do you know someone who is a beginning level reader? What characteristics make this person a beginner?

Share your ideas with a classmate or colleague.

How can we best define a beginning level reader? The Common European Framework (CEF) descriptors indicate that a *Breakthrough user* (beginning level) of English can:

- understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words, and basic phrases and rereading as required.
- understand short, simple messages on postcards.
- recognize familiar names, words, and very basic phrases on simple notices in the most common everyday situations.
- get an idea of the content of simpler informational material and short simple descriptions, especially if there is visual support.
- follow short, simple written directions (e.g., go from X to Y).

A *Waystage user* (also a beginning level) of English can:

- read very short, simple texts.
- find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, and timetables on familiar topics.
- understand short, simple personal letters.
- understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a portion of shared international vocabulary items.
- locate specific information in lists and isolate the information required (e.g., Yellow pages to find a service provider).
- understand everyday signs and notices in public places, such as streets, restaurants, and railway stations, and in work places such as instructions, directions, and warnings.

The information above helps us understand that with beginning level readers our primary purpose will be to help them be able to move beyond reading isolated words and phrases to reading connected text.

Write three things that you think are important to teach a beginning level reader.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Find someone you know who is a beginning level reader. Ask them to identify the three things they want most to be taught. Write them here.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____