

Reading - a problem free skill?

Choosing authentic material

- <Georgina> Hi, welcome to the chat! If you have any questions for Jeremy, please send them in.
<emese> What magazines or newspapers do you recommend teenagers -beginner learners of English - to read as authentic material?
- <jeremy_harmer> emese, that's a very difficult one to call because beginner students may be very demotivated by inappropriate material that they can't read. I think a lot would depend on what the teacher was able to do to help (with guided tasks etc). Do you have any 'favourites' yourself?
- <Georgina> emese, do you use any material with your students - where do you teach?
<bob> What do you classify as 'authentic'? If it has been adapted for the students is it still 'authentic'?
- <emese> Georgina, to tell the truth, I haven't come across any teenage magazines in England that would be acceptable here.
- <jeremy_harmer> wow, emese, where's 'here'?
- <emese> Jeremy, 'here' is eastern Europe. I only thought you do not want to know the country as I was supposed to choose a nickname.
- <jeremy_harmer> Students *can* get a lot from authentic material, even at comparatively low levels, but I am sure it helps if teachers offer them achievable tasks with such material - however most modern British teen magazines will have some cultural content that is 'difficult' for some readers.
- <Georgina> Emese, it's just interesting to see what experiences teachers have around the world.
<jeremy_harmer> Well, it's a very nice nickname!!
- <bob> Emese, are there strict rules in your country about what you can use?
<Georgina> Teenage material is problematic because there are a lot of subjects that are not 'suitable' - do you agree?
- <bob> I teach in London, and I know that when some students come, we have to change the material we use. Some students are offended so we need to use material that is not authentic as there is nothing real to use.
- <jeremy_harmer> I think this is where the Internet can come into its own. If the teacher saves desirable sites as favourites and then gives students tasks to do with those sites, you get the advantage of authenticity together with a measure of teacher control.
- <jeremy_harmer> Bob, I understand the problem. Personally I am very keen on 'learner literature' - often referred to as 'simplified readers'. They give students really good language exposure and, when they are well-written, good and satisfying English entertainment.

Reading at low levels

- <Georgina> I think emese is interested in low levels. Jeremy - can websites also be used for beginner or elementary students?
- <emese> I would like you to give a few tasks for beginner or elementary level e.g. is it possible to ask children to find words with three 's'-es etc. in the headlines of newspapers etc.?
Jeremy, I wonder if you know pieces of literature that contain some passages which are readable by elementary students as well
- <jeremy_harmer> emese, that kind of task (the 3 'ss') is fine - also asking them to find words which begin with a consonant combination - or are verbs or adjectives or something. - though I would be keener on finding the name of the writer/main character/city etc.
- <Georgina> Hi Anlarm, welcome to the chat, at the moment, we're discussing reading for low levels - if you have any questions or comments, please send them in.
- <anlarm> Thank you Georgina - and hello to Jeremy, we met in Cambridge in 95
- <Georgina> Where are you from Anlarm?
- <anlarm> Cyprus (north Cyprus)
- <jeremy_harmer> Oh, hi anlarm. Nice to 'see' you again!
- <bob> emese, I wouldn't worry too much about the level of the texts, it's what you do with them that counts. Making the tasks suitable for the students so they are not demotivated.
- <anlarm> Two weeks ago I listened to S. Krashen here in Cyprus. He talked about "free voluntary

- <Georgina> reading" or "sustained silent reading"
can you explain that to us, Anlarm?
- <anlarm> Well, Krashen says that, if we give ss 10 mins in each class to read whatever they like in L2, they will get a hang on it and continue reading at home too.
- <Georgina> Do you agree with that everyone?
- <jeremy_harmer> I sympathise with Krashen's claims for reading - and I am 100% convinced of the desirability of extensive reading (the kind he is talking about) but I'm in favour of providing quite formal reading programmes to make sure all students read as much as possible...

Encouraging students to read

- <emese> Jeremy, the other problem is at medium level as well that it is only bright students who want to read. All the rest only want to watch TV or play computer games. It is a general trend.
- <anlarm> Unfortunately you are right emese
- <jeremy_harmer> emese, that's a very good point. I think having some classroom reading time (see anlarm's comments) is one answer, and then setting up a reading programme - organising a library etc has to make it part of the curriculum - and may even encourage students who would not normally dream of reading at home!.
- <Georgina> emese, would your students read in class for ten minutes?
- <anlarm> Some research done in Fiji islands and elsewhere showed that test groups who did free reading were more successful in tests, as compared to others who did not do that. I believe it helps because ss are not ""threatened"" by a test on their reading
- <bob> So how can we encourage students to read?
- anlarm- But of course we need to have lots of reading material (papers, magazines, books etc) in our classroom so that ss will have a choice of materials
- <bob> I like to take texts and cut them all up or take chunks out and do a lot of prediction work - I find it stimulates the students and gives them more reasons to keep reading.
- <jeremy_harmer> Having a lot of material in the classroom is great, provided students can access it and provided they can understand a sufficient amount of it!
- <emese> That's a good piece of advice - to have a 10-minute of silent reading. However, I think that's too much.
- <jeremy_harmer> You may be right emese. It depends how long the class is! But 10 minutes means students can read more than, say, just two paragraphs.
- <Georgina> How much time would you give Emese? Do any of you use websites as a source of reading material?
- <anlarm> This is my first time in this live chat session. However, I regret I have to go since it is supper time here. I will bookmark this site and come back again.
- <Georgina> Thanks for coming anlarm - we'll see you next time! The transcript will also be available on the site in the next few days.
- <jeremy_harmer> bye anlarm. Thanks for your contribution.

Training teachers

- <Georgina> Ok, the last couple of questions now, here's one from Emese...
- <emese> What activities would you carry out with teachers on an in-service course that they should be able to develop their students' reading skills in a more effective way?
- <jeremy_harmer> emese, I'd start with the kind of activities that bob suggested. I'd make sure teachers were happy with the concept of prediction, and that they were happy. I'd try to encourage teachers to get students to read different types of texts in different ways. I'd give them lots of reading experiences (at their level) which were fun - to give them enthusiasm to do the same kinds of activities with their own students (at a lower level, of course!)
- <bob> And remembering that reading doesn't need to be a solitary activity. Sure students will read the text by themselves, but then they can work together.
- <emese> Prediction always works well. What else?
- <bob> Try playing some games with the reading texts
- <jeremy_harmer> Well, following bob, jigsaw reading is really useful/enjoyable & communicative (where different students have to read different parts of a text and then have to



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reassemble it. Speed reading - where students have to extract basic info immediately, is great, and so is getting students to transfer info in the text to charts, diagrams - or reading as the basis for a Q & A role-play for example. Though we should not forget to use texts as language resources.

<bob>

Yes, I'd like to know what percentage of class time you'd expect to spend on reading?

<Georgina>

I guess the percentage depends on the task, and as Jeremy says, reading can be made communicative, too so it's not all heads down in a book/text.

<jeremy_harmer>

The amount of time you spend on anything depends on what you want to achieve (easy comment!). Provided reading is used in an engaging manner - the right kind of tasks - you can't have enough of it!

<emese>

I agree with Georgina's view that reading in class is different from reading from a coursebook as you can make the whole thing interactive.

<jeremy_harmer>

Yes, emese, I completely agree with you (though you can play tricks with coursebook readings too!)

<Georgina>

Definitely - make reading interactive, really hold your students' attention - then they'll be encouraged to read more!

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