Types of Reading

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Overview:

Aims of the web page:

Several types of reading may occur in a language classroom. One way in which these may be categorized, as suggested by Brown (1989) can be outlined as follows:

A. Oral
B. Silent
   I. Intensive
      a. linguistic
      b. content
   II. Extensive
      a. skimming
      b. scanning
      c. global

The first distinction that can be made is whether the reading is oral or silent. This web page will not deal with oral reading, only silent reading.

Within the category of silent reading, one encounters **intensive** and **extensive** reading. Intensive reading is used to teach or practice specific reading strategies or skills. The text is treated as an *end* in itself. Extensive reading on the other hand, involves reading of large quantities of material, directly and fluently. It is treated as a *means* to an end. It may include reading reading simply for pleasure or reading technical, scientific or professional material. This later type of text, more academic, may involve two specific types of reading, **scanning** for key details or **skimming** for the essential meaning. A relatively quick and efficient read, either on its own or after scanning or skimming, will give a **global** or general meaning.

This web page then will first examine intensive reading. The second part will deal with extensive reading, with a focus on how it results in a general or global meaning. The fourth part gives a short comment on how intensive and extensive reading may
operate in the same class. The fourth part examines scanning and the fifth, scanning. A final sixth part comments on how scanning and skimming may be used in the same reading.

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### Intensive Reading

In this section:
- **What it is**
- **How it looks**
  - Characteristics
  - Materials
  - Skills developed
  - Activities
  - Assessment
- **When it is used**
- **Role of the teacher**
- **Advantages**
- **Disadvantages**
- **Questions sometimes asked**

#### What it is

- Brown (1989) explains that intensive reading "calls attention to grammatical forms, discourse markers, and other surface structure details for the purpose of understanding literal meaning, implications, rhetorical relationships, and the like." He draws an analogy to intensive reading as a "zoom lens" strategy.
- Long and Richards (1987) say it is a "detailed in-class" analysis, led by the teacher, of vocabulary and grammar points, in a short passage.
- Intensive Reading, sometimes called "Narrow Reading", may involve students reading selections by the same author or several texts about the same topic. When this occurs, content and grammatical structures repeat themselves and students get many opportunities to understand the meanings of the text. The success of "Narrow Reading" on improving reading comprehension is based on the premise that the more familiar the reader is with the text, either due to the subject matter or having read other works by the same author, the more comprehension is promoted.

#### How it looks

**Characteristics:**

- usually classroom based
- reader is *intensely* involved in looking *inside* the text
- students focus on linguistic or semantic details of a reading
- students focus on surface structure details such as grammar and discourse markers
- students identify key vocabulary
- students may draw pictures to aid them (such as in problem solving)
- texts are read carefully and thoroughly, again and again
- aim is to build more language knowledge rather than simply practice the skill of reading
- seen more commonly than extensive reading in classrooms
Materials:

- usually very short texts - not more than 500 words in length
- chosen for level of difficulty and usually, by the teacher
- chosen to provide the types of reading and skills that the teacher wants to cover in the course

Skills developed:

- rapid reading practice
- interpreting text by using:
  - word attack skills
  - text attack skills
  - non-text information

Activities:

Intensive reading exercises may include:

- looking at main ideas versus details
- understanding what is implied versus stated
- making inferences
- looking at the order of information and how it effects the message
- identifying words that connect one idea to another
- identifying words that indicate change from one section to another

Munby (1979) suggests four categories of questions that may be used in intensive reading. These include:

1. Plain Sense - to understand the factual, exact surface meanings in the text
2. Implications - to make inferences and become sensitive to emotional tone and figurative language
3. Relationships of thought - between sentences or paragraphs
4. Projective - requiring the integration of information from the text to one's own background information

Note that questions may fall into more than one category.

Assessment:

Assessment of intensive reading will take the form of reading tests and quizzes. The most common systems of questioning are multiple-choice and free-response. Mackay (1968) in his book *Reading in a Second Language*, reminds teachers that the most important objective in the reading class should NOT be the testing of the student to see if they have understood. Teachers should, instead, be spending most of the time training the student to understand what they read.

When it is used

- when the objective of reading is to achieve full understanding of:
  - logical argument
  - rhetorical pattern of text
- emotional, symbolic or social attitudes and purposes of the author
- linguistic means to an end

- for study of content material that are difficult

**Role of the teacher**

- The teacher chooses suitable text.
- The teacher chooses tasks and activities to develop skills.
- The teacher gives direction before, during and after reading.
- The teacher prepares students to work on their own. Often the most difficult part is for the teacher to "get out of the way".
- The teacher encourages students through prompts, without giving answers.

**Advantages**

- It provides a base to study structure, vocabulary and idioms.
- It provides a base for students to develop a greater control of language.
- It provides for a check on the degree of comprehension for individual students.

**Disadvantages**

- There is little actual practice of reading because of the small amount of text.
- In a class with multi-reading abilities, students may not be able to read at their own level because everyone in the class is reading the same material.
- The text may or may not interest the reader because it was chosen by the teacher.
- There is little chance to learn language patterns due to the small amount of text.
- Because exercises and assessment usually follow intensive reading, students may come to associate reading with testing and not pleasure.

**Questions sometimes asked**

- Should the text be read aloud first or some explanation given?
  - Nuttall (1986) suggests that if the teacher reads the text aloud before starting work on it, they have assumed part of the students' job.
  - Others argue that without some help some students could not understand the text.
  - Still others argue that it is easy to underestimate students. they may actually understand more than is thought. If students cannot make any progress, the material may be unsuitable.

**Extensive Reading**

In this section:
- What it is
- Historical perspective
- Background theory
- How extensive reading may appear in a language class
- Types of programs
- Characteristics
- Materials
- Activities
- Assessment
- Role of teacher
- Role of student
What it is

- Brown (1989) explains that extensive reading is carried out "to achieve a general understanding of a text."
- Long and Richards (1971, p.216) identify extensive reading as "occurring when students read large amounts of high interest material, usually out of class, concentrating on meaning, "reading for gist" and skipping unknown words."
- The aims of extensive reading are to build reader confidence and enjoyment.
- Extensive reading is always done for the comprehension of main ideas, not for specific details.

Historical Perspective

- Harold Palmer (1917) in Britain and Michael West (1926) in India were the first to pioneer the theory of extensive reading as an approach to foreign language teaching and to reading, in particular. Palmer chose the term "extensive reading" to distinguish it from "intensive reading".
- the 1929 Coleman Report on "Modern Foreign Language Study", introducing the Reading Method, recommended the inclusion of extensive reading in its Method (as distinct from inclusive reading).
  - Students were to read in the second language without a conscious effort to translate.
  - Emphasis was placed on developing independent silent reading and increasing reading rate of individual students.
  - Frequency word counts were developed and used as a basis for graded readers.
- Broughton (1978) argued for the important role Extensive Reading could play in second language programs.
- Nuttall (1982) wrote that the idea of Extensive Reading should be "standard practice" in second language learning. She suggested the following "slogan": "The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among the speakers. The next best way is to read extensively." (p.168)
- Krashen (1984) supported Extensive Reading because he felt it automatically gave rise to competence in writing. In 1993, he termed it "free voluntary reading".
- Krashen (1995) argued that 'free voluntary reading" could be used a a "bridge" from communicative language competence to academic language competence.
- David Eskey (1995) drew the analogy of reading instruction to teaching swimming strokes to people who hated the water. It would be only through their discovery of the rewards of reading by actually doing it, that they would become people that can and do read.
- Elley (1996), in his report on a study involving 210,000 students and 10,000 teachers in 32 educational systems around the world, concluded that "instructional programs that stress teacher directed drills and skills are less beneficial in raising literacy levels than programs that try to capture students' interest and encourage them to read independently."
- Dupre's research (1997) in French supported the theory that Extensive Reading is more pleasurable and beneficial for language acquisition than grammar instruction and practice.
Nuttal (1998) argued the case for Extensive Reading programs citing research studies that showed "impressive" gains in reading ability, motivation and attitude, and overall linguistic competence. There was also evidence of gains in vocabulary and spelling.

Although research strongly suggests that extensive reading can boost second language acquisition, few second language learners engage in voluntary reading at their own initiative, (i.e. Reluctant Readers) and require guidance in the form of Extensive Reading programs.

**Background theory**

Several theories come into play in Extensive Reading:

- **Krashen's Input Hypothesis** (1982) made a distinction between acquisition and learning. For Krashen, the dominant mode of language learning is in *acquisition*, the largely subconscious "picking up of the language" which characterizes language in informal settings and which is similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language." (p.10) Language acquisition represents unconscious learning which takes place when attention is focused on meaning rather than form. In order to acquire language, Krashen suggested the learner must be exposed to large amounts of second language input that was "meaningful", interesting, relevant, not grammatically sequenced, and in a low anxiety setting. It is felt that Extensive Reading programs provide such an environment.

- The **L1=L2 Hypothesis** suggests that second language learning, like the first, follows a highly predictable pattern. If the conditions of first language acquisition are approximated by extensive second language reading, the second language learner can achieve native like competence in a classroom. An extension of this suggests that reading for pleasure from appropriate second language texts provides subconscious and progressively more difficult second language input much like that essential for first language acquisition.

- **Rumelhart (1980)** proposed an "interactive model" of the reading process in which reading is a complex task of simultaneously combining "bottom-up" processes (in which the reader analyzes text in small pieces and builds meaning from these) and "top-down" processes (in which the reader makes "guesses" about the content of a passage). It is thought that Extensive Reading programs provide the quantities of reading practice necessary for the automaticity of the "bottom-up" (word recognition) process.

**How extensive reading may appear in a language class**

**Types of programs:**

Extensive reading may appear as any of the following:

1. a complement to an intensive reading program
2. an extra-curricular activity where students read out of class
3. the main focus of a reading course (termed an Extensive Reading Program) where students work with a class set of books, individual reading of material, of their own choice, with follow-up activities such as reading logs, reading journals, book reports or projects. Although it is less common for extensive reading to form an entire reading course, there are well-established Extensive Reading Programs operating around the world. They have been carried on in many countries, at varying levels of education from Elementary School to College, and in different languages.

**Characteristics:**
Day and Bamford (1980) put forward ten characteristics identified in successful Extensive Reading Programs. They are duplicated (in abbreviated form) below:

1. Students read as much as possible.
2. A variety of materials on a range of topics is available.
3. Students select what they want to read.
4. The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
5. Reading is its own reward.
6. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar.
7. Reading is individual and silent.
8. Reading speed is usually faster than slower.
9. Teachers orient students to the goals of the program.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader for the students.

Bell (2001), in his article "Extensive Reading: What is it? Why bother?" gives ten pieces of practical advice on running Extensive Reading programs.

**Materials:**

With demands for both *simplicity* and *authenticity*, the teacher must choose from the following:

**Graded Readers** available by major publishers (e.g., Cambridge University Press, Heinemann, Oxford and Penguin)
- These are readers with specific levels of word frequency and idiom counts and the introduction of new vocabulary at a planned rate.
- Broughton (1978) favors using graded readers where less than one word in every hundred is unfamiliar.
- These are a good choice for students whose second language proficiency makes it difficult for them to read texts written for native speakers.

**Texts on the same topic**
- Reading more than one text on the same topic allows students to bring more background knowledge to each new text read.

**Authentic materials** such as newspapers, magazines, that are related to the second language culture

**Web resources**
- These should be chosen from suggestions by the teacher so that students do not choose those that are too overwhelming.

**Stories and articles chosen by the teacher**, with the following guidelines:

1. The style should include repetition, without being monotonous.
2. New vocabulary should not occur at the same place as difficulties of structure.
3. The text should break in sections that are not too long. This is to give the reader a feeling of accomplishment when completed.
4. Authors should be chosen with less complex structure and less extensive vocabulary range.
5. The subject matter should be of *real* interest to the students and suitable for their age level. Rivers (1981) suggests the subject matter should be as close as
possible to the type of material the students would read in their first language.

Some thought may be given to socio-cultural issues. Should there be an attempt to match materials to students' cultural background? Students bring different knowledge of text types from their first language. Is it feasible to include these in the materials?

Annotated reading lists are available, suggesting books that can be read for pleasure and a minimum of frustration for new language learners. Books that are recommended for English as a Second Language include the following:


Materials should be chosen that are at or below the reading ability of the student. They are usually at a lower level of difficulty than those chosen for intensive reading. This is for several reasons:

1. It builds automatic recognition of words
2. It allows the reader to see words in "chunks" of language, allowing for faster reading.

**Activities that may occur:**

- Reading may be combined with a speaking component. For example, they may interview each other about their reading.
- Reading may be combined with a writing component. For example, after reading the newspaper, students may be asked to write a newspaper report.
- Class time may be included for book exchange, if there is an in-class library.
- Students may set their own goals for their next session.
- Students may progress from reading graded reading material to authentic text. It should be expected that students will "slow down" in their reading then, it it becomes more challenging.
- Students may complete any of the following:
  1. a reading log (recording number of pages read and at what level)
  2. a reading journal (reactions on the text read)

A reading journal may take the following format:
- date, title of book and author
- the category of the book if known by the student
- a brief statement on what the book is about
- a summary of each part as it is read
- student's reactions to each part

Often teachers will respond to the students and if so, the student should leave room in the journal for this.

3. a reflection on what they noticed about their own reading
4. a book report or summary - Helgesen (1997) recommends not spending more than 20 minutes on a report
5. a retelling of part of the text
6. book project

- In some Extensive Reading Programs, teachers will allow their students to report on their reading in their native language so as not to make the "proof" of
reading more difficult than the reading itself. This, of course, only works if the teacher understands the student's first language.

- Extensive reading programs are often cited as being more "pleasurable" because there are no "tedious" exercises to complete.

Assessment:

- there are no reading comprehension exercises or formal assessments in Extensive Reading programs.
- Course grades for an Extensive Reading program may be determined by marks given for reading reports, reading journals, book reports and projects.

Role of Teacher

- The teacher gives recommendations on reading materials, based on student's interests.
  - The teacher guides students in choosing appropriate levels of material, beginning with easy books.
  - The teacher guides students in choosing a variety of materials of their interest. This may especially be necessary for students that choose the same type over and over.
- The teacher guides students in setting specific goals for amounts read.
- The teacher provides modeling. If class time is given for reading, the teacher reads at the same time.
- The teacher overlooks if students are not aware of the exact meaning of each word. The teacher should not jump in and explain.
- The teacher leads pre-reading activities to build interest in the text, such as in the characters, places, themes, and actions. The teacher must be careful to provide just enough to stimulate curiosity but not so much that the need to read is removed.

Role of Student

- The student assumes total responsibility for developing reading ability.
- The student reads without the use of a dictionary.
- The student usually chooses their own material and moves along at their own pace but must push themselves in order to show greater progress.

Advantages

- The students may:
  - develop a "reading habit"
  - gain more confidence in reading
  - improve their attitude towards reading and become more motivated to read
  - feel more autonomous over their own learning and more likely to take more initiative.
  - become more "independent readers", being able to read for different purposes and being able to change reading strategies for different kinds of texts
  - become more aware of what's available to them to read and how to access materials
  - expand sight vocabulary
  - acquire "incidental" grammatical competence - that is, it may be acquired even though it was not directly taught
  - build background knowledge
  - increase reading comprehension
  - improve overall language competence
- be more prepared for further academic courses because they have read large quantities

- An Extensive Reading program may be combined with writing or combined with speaking practice in a meaningful way (such as when students discuss with each other the books they have been reading.
- Broughton (1978) suggested that "It is by pursuing the activity of extensive reading that the volume of practice necessary to achieve rapid and efficient reading can be achieved." (p.92)
- Krashen (1993a) suggested that the benefits of free voluntary reading included "enhanced language acquisition and literacy development, more ideas and information, greater success in life, loss of verbal memory, and more fun."

**Challenges:**

- An Extensive Reading program may be costly and time-consuming to set up if materials are not already available. It may be difficult to get support from Administration.
- Students need to have easy access to texts within their language proficiency level. An Extensive Reading program is easiest to establish when the students have a high level of second language proficiency. For intermediate levels, students require a specialized library within their language proficiency range. They need texts they can read without great use of a dictionary.
- It may be difficult to keep students challenged to read more difficult texts as the program continues. Some established programs use a "weighing scale" for students to record materials read, giving more "marks" for materials read at a higher level. Although this has proven to be a motivating or competitive factor in some cases, in others it becomes counter-productive if students try to read texts that are more difficult than they can manage and consequently become discouraged.
- Reading each student's journals and reports can be very time-consuming for teachers.
- Students who come from a culture in which literacy is not valued may be unwilling to participate in pleasure reading or may not get support at home.
- Some teachers prefer a skills based program and do not feel comfortable with Extensive Reading.
- Some teachers are unaware of how to use Graded Readers and so, provide a limited range of activities for students, limiting their responses.
- Some teachers feel that time spent on Extensive Reading will take away from time that could be spent on learning language skills. Others will argue that Extensive Reading provides a "richer context" for practice.
- Some people feel that if graded readers are used, they can give a false impression of the level of reading that has been achieved. They feel that some students may try "ungraded" materials too soon and may revert to using a dictionary to translate.
- Some people feel that students may place too much emphasis on the number of pages read instead of on the understanding achieved.
- Students that have only been exposed to Intensive Reading programs may not believe that Extensive Reading is a "proper" way to learn.
- Aeberscold (1997) reported that feedback from students in an Extensive Reading program indicated that they liked the "choice" but not the "load"

**Research topics**

- What is the impact of extensive reading on attitude and motivation to read?
- How does vocabulary acquisition while reading compare to direct vocabulary instruction?
- What is the relation between amounts of reading and growth in reading comprehension?
- What are the students' perceptions of their reading, their habits and difficulties?
- Do students that have an extensive reading component of their program show greater improvements reading than students who have no such component?
- Do the use of simplified authentic texts actually increase comprehension or simply confidence?
- Past studies have shown that extensive reading leads to gains in students' second language proficiency as measured on cloze tests. Would the use of cloze exercises in addition to extensive reading be more effective than intensive reading alone?
- What other improvements in the area of language uses and language knowledge may result from Extensive Reading?

### Intensive and Extensive Reading Together

It is common for both approaches to reading to be used in the same class. For example, where extensive reading is encouraged, the teacher may have all the students read the same text so they can discuss the topic together or learn a specific skill such as as writing an outline.

In a class where intensive reading is mostly used, students may be asked to read texts of their own choosing to report back on, in either an oral or written format.

In both approaches, it is not the nature of the skills that are of most interest but rather, the results.

### Scanning

In this section:
- What it is
- When it is used
- Role of Teacher
- Role of Student
- Activities
- Research Questions

#### What it is

- Scanning is a quick reading, focusing on locating specific information.
- Scanning involves quick eye movements, not necessarily linear in fashion, in which the eyes wander until the reader finds the piece of information needed.
- Scanning is used when a specific piece of information is required, such as a name, date, symbol, formula, or phrase, is required. The reader knows what the item looks like and so, knows when he has located what he was searching for. It is assumed then, that very little information is processed into long-term memory or even for immediate understanding because the objective is simply matching.

#### When it is used

- Scanning is used often with technical, scientific or professional materials to locate specific information.
Scanning is a valuable skill for second language learners to develop because often they do not require a detailed read of a text. There are many everyday uses for scanning, relevant to a purpose, such as reading a schedule.

**Role of Teacher**

- The teacher selects passages that do include specific information.
- The teacher may use authentic materials that are commonly scanned in real life, such as the telephone directory, menus, bus schedules.
- The teacher may ask students before they scan a text to note how the information is organized in the text.
- The teacher needs to remind students that as they read carefully to find the required information, they should pay particular attention to titles and keywords.

**Role of the Student**

- The student forms questions before reading. What specific information are they looking for?
- The student looks for contextual clues. The student tries to anticipate what the answer might look like and what sorts of clues would be useful.
- The student is aware of the graphic form that the answer may take, such as a numeral, a written number, a capitalized word or a short phrase that includes key words.

**Activities**

- Activities may include exercises that are devised by the teacher in which students scan for a single word or specific text.
- Activities may include exercises that are often carried on as a competition so students will work quickly.
- Students use skills of prediction and anticipation. Students may do any of the following:
  - make predictions and guesses
  - use titles and tables of contents to get an idea of what a passage is about
  - activate prior knowledge about the topic of the passage by answering some questions or performing a quiz
  - anticipate what they want to learn about the top
  - use titles, pictures, and prior knowledge to anticipate the contents of the text
  - use key words, that may have been given to them by the teacher, that do not appear in the text, that allude to the main idea

It is an accepted view today that efficient readers are not passive. They react with a text by having expectations and ideas about the purposes of the text as well as possible outcomes. They reflect on expectations as they read, anticipate what will come next. In other words, they "interact with the text".

**Research Questions**

- Does the skill of scanning transfer from the first language to the second?

**Skimming**
In this section:
What it is
When it is used
Role of the teacher
Role of the student
Activities
Research Questions

What it is

- Skimming is a quick reading to get:
  - to know the general meaning of a passage
  - to know how the passage is organized, that is, the structure of the text
  - to get an idea of the intention of the writer

- Skimming is a more complex task than scanning because it requires the reader to organize and remember some of the information given by the author, not just to locate it.
- Skimming is a tool in which the author's sequence can be observed, unlike scanning in which some predetermined information is sought after.

When it is used

- Skimming is used when reading some some general question in mind.
- Skimming is used in making decisions on how to approach a text such as when determining if a careful reading is deserving.
- Skimming is used to build student confidence and an understanding that it is possible to gain meaning without reading every word in a text.
- Skimming is used as part of the SQ3R method of reading, often for speed reading. This method involves the student in surveying, questioning, reading, reviewing and reciting. Skimming is used for the initial survey and for review.
- Skimming is a skill that a student may want to develop if they are planning to continue with academic studies. It is often used in reviewing for a test.

Role of the teacher

- Before the students start reading, the teacher should guide students to ask themselves the following questions:
  - What kind of audience was the text written for? Was it, for example, the general public, technical readers, or academic students?
  - What type of text is it? Is it, for example, a formal letter, an advertisement, or a set of instructions?
  - What was the author's purpose? Was it, for example, to persuade, to inform or to instruct?

- The teacher should make the following clear to students before assigning a skimming exercise:

  1. the purpose of the exercise
  2. how deeply the text is to be read

Role of the student

- Students read through the text in the following manner:

  1. Read the title if any.
2. Read the introduction or the first paragraph.
3. Read the first sentence of each of the following paragraphs.
4. Read any headings or sub-headings.
5. Look at any pictures or phrases that are in boldface or italics
6. Read the summary or last paragraph.

Activities

- Students must locate facts that are expressed in sentences, not single words.
- Although speed is essential and the teacher often sets a time limit to the activity, skimming should not be done competitively. Students should be encouraged individually to better themselves.
- To improve skimming, readers should read more and more rapidly, to form appropriate questions and predictions and then read quickly.
- Pugh (1978) suggests that to assess skimming, after the students have read and completed the assigned questions, further questions may be asked, "beyond the scope of the purpose originally set" (p.70). If students can answer these questions correctly, it indicates they have read the text too closely.

Research Questions

- Does the skill of skimming transfer from the first language to the second?

Skimming and Scanning Together

Skimming and scanning are sometimes referred to as types of reading and at other times, as skills.

Skimming involves a thorough overview of a text and implies a reading competence. Scanning is more a limited activity, only retrieving information relevant to a purpose.

Brown (1994) suggested that "perhaps the two most valuable reading strategies for learners as well as native speakers are skimming and scanning." (p.283)

Pugh (1978) suggested that since scanning is a less complex style of reading it can be introduced first. Skimming requires greater fluency and more practice is required, so it should be introduced later.

Often skimming and scanning are used together when reading a text. For example, the reader may skim through first to see if it is worth reading, then read it more carefully and scan for a specific piece of information to note.

Students need to learn that they need to adapt their reading and techniques to the purpose of the reading.

By practicing skimming and scanning, the individual learns to read and select specific information without focussing on information that is not important for meaning.

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web site on Extensive Reading:  [http://extensivereading.net](http://extensivereading.net)