



Reading for Comprehension and Fluency:

Exercises for Reading Practice

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Using Prediction Strategies

Reading academic texts successfully happens in “drafts.” Just as a writer may brainstorm a list of ideas, successful reading begins with taking educated guesses in a ***reverse form of brainstorming*** to gain access to the key elements of reading: ***topics and main ideas*** that will set them up for better comprehension in the next phase of reading.

Here is the method: *(NOTE: each step takes only a few seconds)*

1. **Scan:** Glance at the passage, the first paragraph (or the *whole* paragraph if it is just one) as though you were looking for someone’s name in a phone book.
 - a. **Important note:** Do not “read” so much as “see” the page. While you are looking, your goal is to find “What words seem to appear frequently?”
2. **Note:** Write them down.
3. **Read:** Now actually read the first two lines
 - a. *the number of lines is flexible, but aiming for less than half a paragraph.*
4. **Predict:** Does that set of frequent words appear to be part of the “topic”?
5. **Organize:** Scan again for the “transition” words. These are the road signs on the page. Underline them or write them down.
 - a. Examples: “in fact” “however” “yet” “another” “first, second, finally...”
6. **Review:** When you see the first few transition words and compare them with the frequency words, can you decipher the “main idea?”

Practice

Use the following passage to practice the steps of predicting topic and main idea. Use the table below to help you:

Scan	Glance around for a few common words
Note	Write down these words
Read	The first few lines
Predict	Write the topic
Organize	Scan for and underline transition words
Review	What is the main idea?

In the 1950's soda lovers found delight in the new idea of "diet" drinks. Since then, our culture has developed a love-hate relationship with the beverage because we drink so much but are regularly warned of their potential risks. Shortly after the marketing of diet sodas, frightening studies implicated the two sweeteners, *cyclamate* and *saccharin*, as cancer-causing substances. However, the tests were conducted on lab rats. Since then, no studies have ever shown evidence that either cyclamate or saccharin causes cancerous tumors in humans. Similar concerns have arisen about the modern 0-calorie sweetener *Aspartame*, which fields regular assaults about its proclivity for transforming into toxic substances at body temperature, but no evidence yet exists that shows it is carcinogenic. Saccharine and Aspartame are still legal to sell in the U.S. and remain popular pleasures for many Americans.

Organization and Rhetorical Moves

Recent research shows that the largest gain in reading comprehension, especially for non-native readers, comes from taking the time to pay attention to rhetorical elements like: main ideas, supporting ideas, purpose of the text, and genre information. To make use of these rhetorical cues, you have to understand what they are and how to find them.

- Genre information can be found by identifying the location of the text. The word **genre** means “category.” So, a genre is a type of text like: novel, article, essay, text book, etc. Look for hints about the origins of the text.
- The **purpose** of a text can be many things. A writer may wish to inform, analyze, persuade, instruct, give directions, entertain, etc. Key ideas, transition phrases, and the thesis statements can give hints at the purpose.

Pay attention to each of these concepts in order to understand how you should read the text. If you do not pay careful attention to a text, you may fundamentally misunderstand the text, even if you understand all the words.

Practice:

On the following page, read the excerpts and the brief descriptions.

How might you have misinterpreted the passages without knowing the purpose and genre information? Write your thoughts below:

Johnathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" was written in 1729, in England. It is a satirical (comical) look at English poverty, with a "modest" proposal for solution for starving families.

Excerpted from
http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/Coradella_Collegiate_Bookshelf_Collection/swift-amodestproposal.pdf

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most, on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriments and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust.

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"Did you tell my mother to crawl on her hands and knees across the living room floor?" Hugh asks, and I say, "Well, no, not exactly. I just suggested that if she was going to dust the baseboards, that would be the best way to do it."

When Maw Hamrick's around, I don't lift a finger. All my chores go automatically to her, and I just sit in a rocker, raising my feet every now and then so she can pass the vacuum. It's incredibly relaxing, but it doesn't make me look very good, especially if she's doing something strenuous, carrying furniture to the basement, for instance, which again, was completely her idea. I just mentioned in passing that we rarely used the dresser, and that one of these days someone should take it downstairs. I didn't mean her, exactly, though at age seventy-six she's a lot stronger than Hugh gives her credit for. Coming from Kentucky, she's used to a hard day's work. Choppin', totin', all those activities with a dropped g: the way I figure it, these things are in her genes.

David Sedaris wrote his satirical book of essays, *When You are Engulfed in Flames*, in 2008. The following excerpt is from the essay "It's Catching."

Excerpted from page 7
<http://software.newsstand.com/bookrdr/hbg-live/BookBrowse.html?a=kBGZziy9N1O%2B7H5EltlxfQTPtIqAPglblpb07cMZuP9cfKv0u%2FSCxz63VXJdcXAGWfzn8G8W6wdSVPUefqOK487wwOe4LsmB2asdMzJtAYs7TVOtqvdsUMQX0YrFB0VZ&z=hbg>

- **Main ideas**, like a thesis statement or topic sentence will frequently be within the first part of a text or paragraph. They may, instead, be found or be repeated in the closing. They can be identified by the generality of the statement. The main idea is the big picture and does not give specific detail, yet.
- **Supporting ideas** will narrow the focus of the main idea. Supporting ideas give more specific information. These will make up the bulk of the text and paragraphs.

Practice:

1. Read the passage.
2. Find the main idea, what numbered sentence(s) do you find it in? _____
3. What sentences have supporting ideas? _____

When it comes to shoes, women in America are famous for wanting a pair in every style and color.¹ Men, on the other hand, don't seem to need a lot of coaching.² However, according to *Esquire*, the men's lifestyle and fashion magazine, there are some tips that men can use to dress their tootsies right in the workplace and at home.³ At work in a formal office, it is good to know that there are options beyond the formal black shoe.⁴ Men can wear fine grain leather boots, thinner strapped sandals, and leather-bottomed loafers.⁵ However, black is still the preferred color of men's work shoes.⁶ On casual time, brown shoes, boots and thick-strapped sandals are appropriate.⁷ Weekend loafers can shed the leather soles and go for rubber-bottomed comfort.⁸ With a little know-how, guys can gussy-up the fashion on their feet just like the gals do.⁹

Fluency—Avoiding Blocks

Reading for leisure is different from reading for work, school, or reading legal documents. So, you should consider your reading purpose before you change the way you read. However, there are some ineffective ways of reading that can be battled for most reading purposes.

1. Reading the entire document in its exact order.
2. Reading every word, one at a time.
3. Moving your eyes too slowly across the page.
4. Repeating sections several times.
5. Subvocalizing while you read.
6. Being distracted while reading.

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