

To the Teacher and Student

Mastering Academic Reading (MAR) is meant to challenge advanced-level students of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The units and the readings within them are long. The comprehension and expansion exercises are demanding. The desired outcome is that MAR-trained EAP students will be able to better hold their own in university classes where the reading volume and vocabulary demands are high.

The conception of this book owes a lot to William Grabe and Fredricka Stoller and their superb analysis of L1 and L2 reading practices in *Teaching and Researching Reading* (2002). It would be hard to articulate all of the ways in which Grabe and Stoller got EAP reading right, but a few core principles are detailed.

Rapid and automatic access to vocabulary is absolutely prime. As Grabe and Stoller put it,

For good readers, lexical access is automatic. In addition to being very fast, it cannot be readily reflected on consciously, and it cannot be suppressed (a good definition of **automaticity**); that is, when the eye sees a word, the reader cannot stop him or herself from accessing its meaning. Both rapid processing and automaticity in word recognition (for a large number of words) typically require thousands of hours of practice in reading. (p. 21)

Though L1 research underlies this observation, they intend it to inform instruction in L2 reading as well.

The three main purposes for academic reading are as follows.

- **Reading to learn** (reading in order to perform some other task, such as writing a report)
- **Reading to integrate information, write, and critique texts**
- **Reading for basic comprehension**

In most real-life academic situations, the boundaries among these purposes blur. It's difficult to say, for example, where basic comprehension stops and the "critiquing" purpose comes to the fore. Grabe and Stoller call attention to the great importance of mental "models" in integrating, writing, and critiquing, especially "longer text" and "field" models. Both of these reflect an understanding of how knowledge acquired from a

reading fits into patterns—not just a pattern of information within the text but also a pattern of relationships with other texts and “the real world.”

Grabe and Stoller point out that reading for basic comprehension, though definitionally “basic,” is not crude or intellectually simple:

Reading for general comprehension, when accomplished by a skilled fluent reader, requires very rapid and automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general meaning representation of main ideas, and efficient coordination of many processes under very limited time constraints.

These abilities are often taken for granted by fluent readers because they usually occur automatically; that is, we make use of these abilities without giving them much thought if we are fluent readers. In L2 contexts, however, the difficulties that students have in becoming fluent readers of longer texts under time constraints reveal the complexities of reading for general comprehension. Because of its demands for processing efficiency, reading for general understanding may at times even be more difficult to master than reading to learn, an ability that is often assumed to be a more difficult extension of general comprehension abilities. (This misperception is most likely due to the ways in which reading comprehension and reading to learn are commonly tested in schools.) (p. 14–15)

You have probably noticed the emphasis Grabe and Stoller place on **the need to read—and read a lot**. This poses an enormous problem for EAP programs and for EAP materials writers. How do you provide, assign, check comprehension of, and base tasks on enough material? In short, how do you get students to read enough? We have no illusion that we have solved the problem with MAR, but we have at least faced it. We provide a lot of reading material. Each unit—in its three or four readings—provides a total of between about 9,000 and 11,000 words of text, not counting references or exercises. The main point is for students to **read**. Although many classes will seek additional material externally, a class that adopts MAR can be assured of having plenty to work with.

Almost every reading is taken, in minimally adapted form, from a book or academic/professional journal. Two introductory passages (in

Unit 1 and Unit 3) have been composed expressly for this book in order to provide narrowly focused background material. Beyond these pieces, readers are in the hands of “real-world” authors and their difficult, lexically diffuse, and allusion-filled creations. Journal articles and book excerpts predominate, but MAR offers (in Unit 2) a book review and a government pamphlet as well. Academic classes in English-medium universities often draw on materials in such “fringe” genres, so EAP students deserve a chance to work with them as well.

Footnotes and endnotes have been preserved. No one is likely to read these for general enlightenment, but they are part of academic literature. EAP readers need to work with them, if only to get good at ignoring them when appropriate. Although MAR is not meant as a writing book, some tasks do involve writing from external sources, which raises a need to compose reference notes according to prescribed formats. The readings in MAR provide models in the APA style. Teachers are, of course, free to require other formats in student writing, but they should provide samples of notes in the format they prefer.

Unit Structure

Each of the four units in MAR provides enough material for approximately 12 to 18 hours of instructional time. Not every teacher will choose to do all the exercises for every reading, so MAR (or at least much of it) could be covered in a term of as few as 10 four-hour weeks. The exercise sections contain activities for integrating information across readings, but these can be skipped if necessary. It is worth remembering, though, that such integration is among the main reading purposes cited by Grabe and Stoller as important in academic reading. We encourage teachers to use these exercises if doing so is practical.

Since one aspect of reading practice builds on others, the units of MAR are laid out in “tiers,” not in “sections” (with the segregation that word implies). Each unit has been organized into three tiers. In general, there is one reading per tier, although the first tier in Unit 3 contains two passages (both necessary to provide conceptual background for the other two tiers). Each tier focuses on different aspects of academic reading, and again Grabe and Stoller’s analysis has driven the conception of which aspects are vital.

First Tier

Overview or survey passage (ca. 800 words)

Focus: Basic Comprehension

- Text model (main ideas/support, etc.)
- Situational model (integration with personal experience)

Second Tier

Either one core passage (3,500–5,000 words) or two of about 1,600 words each)

Focus: Basic Comprehension and Lexical Access

- Semantic networks
- Inventory vocabulary used in the first- and second-tier readings
- Integration of two readings (exercises about relationships between the two)

Third Tier

Core passage (3,500–5,000 words)

Focus: Reading to Learn, Reading to Integrate Information, and Reading to Write a Longer Text Model

- Field model (integrate learning in three readings; discern reliable sources and other topics to pursue in order to learn more)
- Update lexical inventory

We hope that students and teachers enjoy working with the readings in MAR. They represent the work of fine academicians and popular writers. They range widely through topics in science and social observation, but all articles have been chosen with an eye toward enduring substance. Every reading ages. We hope these will age well and will lead to lifelong engagement with academic texts.