

To the Teacher

The purpose of each *Challenges* textbook is to help students become better readers through explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies that will break counter-productive habits, such as word-for-word translation. *Challenges 1* has eight units with two chapters in each. Each unit begins with an introduction to the topic—generally a one-page activity to activate students’ interest and background knowledge.

Each chapter consists of six sections, each one designed to support students’ understanding of a reading passage. **Getting Ready to Read** previews the specific reading topic the same way that the introduction previews the unit. **Vocabulary Preview** familiarizes students with the meaning of the eight vocabulary items highlighted in the chapter.

Skills

The **Reading Skills** section teaches one of three types: *basic reading skills*, *dictionary skills*, or *sentence-level grammar skills*. *Basic reading skills* include previewing, skimming, scanning, making inferences, and critical thinking as you read. These skills, which are essential to the development of a proficient reader, are addressed mostly in the first half of the book and practiced in later chapters. *Dictionary skills* address when to use a dictionary and look at different parts of an entry. The effective use of a dictionary is crucial to learning a language, and becoming familiar with an ESL/EFL learner dictionary can aid learners in ways other than understanding the meaning of a word. Learner dictionaries offer information not found in other dictionaries, such as usage notes, collocations, frequency of use, and register. *Sentence-level grammar skills* examine problematic grammatical structures, like coordinating conjunctions and transitions, cause-and-effect words and phrases, and pronoun references. These specific points are covered because they enhance sentence-level understanding and promote a grasp of understanding of how ideas are related within paragraphs.

These 16 different reading skills are labeled strategies and boxed. For example, a typical **Reading Skill** box includes the name of the skill, its purpose, examples, and explanations. After focusing on a reading skill, students practice using it in short exercises based on the reading passage.

Study Tip boxes contain helpful information on studying, such as where and when to study, ways to study for tests, and advice about joining study groups.

Post-Reading Activities

The **Reading Comprehension** exercise includes about ten questions on the content of the reading. These are objective questions (true/false and multiple choice) and open-ended questions to which students have to write a short answer. In later chapters, the answers require more thoughtful responses as higher-level reading skills (inference, distinguishing fact from opinion) are addressed. In **Discuss Your Ideas**, small groups of students talk about their thoughts and ideas about the events and/or dilemmas that are presented in the reading.

Vocabulary

A primary goal of *Challenges* is for students to increase their vocabulary by improving their word-learning skills and expanding each set of target words into related word forms. We agree with Keith S. Folse (*Vocabulary Myths*, 2004) that vocabulary acquisition and retention are critically important to second language learners and require a structured approach. Some textbooks emphasize using context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words. While we agree that paying attention to context is a valuable reading skill, our vocabulary exercises bypass this approach and directly support students' ability to recognize and comprehend the words encountered in each unit. Students will learn eight words in each chapter by focusing on their meanings and use in the reading passage and by retrieving the words in review exercises. An important aspect of vocabulary development is knowing all the ways a word is used. So students may know one meaning of the target vocabulary but not all. And, as Folse (2004) says, it can take as many as seven retrievals to learn a word. Students are also asked to use them in short writing assignments based on the readings. Each chapter also has a word form chart that includes the *most commonly used* forms of the targeted words. (It should be noted that ONLY the common forms are listed in the chart even though there may be other possible forms.) **Vocabulary Skill** boxes show students a variety of systematic approaches to organizing vocabulary acquisition, which will support students' independent word-learning skills as they progress beyond the scope of this book.

To determine which words to target, written passages were filtered through the Vocabulary Profiler developed by Laufer & Nation ("Vocabulary Size and Use," *Applied*

Linguistics, 1995) and adapted for the web by Tom Cobb at the University of Quebec at Montreal (www.lex tutor.ca/vp/). Roughly half of the target words are from the list of 2,000 most frequent words used in English and the other half from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, “A New Academic Word List,” *TESOL Quarterly*, 2000). We think that these results make a valuable list to which students can add other words that they want to learn.

Timed/Paced Reading

Because studies show that it’s hard to comprehend a reading passage if students read it too slowly, activities for increasing reading speed are included at the end of each unit. Bell (“Extensive Reading: Speed and Comprehension,” *The Reading Matrix Online Journal*, 2001) reports that a slow reader cannot keep in mind what he or she has read long enough to remember how it relates to what is being read at the moment. Therefore, it is important that English language learners try to read at a pace of at least 200 words per minute. This is especially important for academic students, but even casual reading requires a certain speed to comprehend, follow, and enjoy the reading. It is hard, though, for English language students to read without wanting to understand everything and therefore wanting to look up all the words that they don’t understand in a passage. This, of course, greatly slows down the reading process and is actually a detriment to overall understanding. As a way of demonstrating to students that they can understand a lot more than they think when they read at a faster pace, two types of timed reading activities are presented in this book. Both types require students to read a short passage at a faster-than-normal pace and then answer some objective questions. Keeping track of the pace they read at and the score they get on the questions can dramatically show them that reading quickly does not detract from understanding. In fact, it may improve it.

The first type of activity, **timed reading**, is very common in language classes. Students set their own pace and try to increase the speed each time they read a passage. (See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the procedure.) The second type of activity, **paced reading**, can be considerably more effective at showing students that understanding the passage while reading at a faster rate is possible. In paced reading activities, the teacher sets the pace for the whole class and then pushes the students to read at a faster pace at regular intervals. (See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the procedure.) In both types of activities, students keep track of their reading speed and their comprehension score, but in paced reading, they can see that even though they are reading faster, their comprehension score remains the same or slowly increases once the new pace becomes somewhat comfortable.

Extra Materials

Because good readers read quickly, which demonstrates automaticity—a sign of fluency—a timed/paced reading has been added to each chapter. **Appendix 1** contains the questions for the timed/paced reading passages at the end of each unit.

Appendix 2, Increasing Reading Speed, explains the procedures for timed and paced reading for teachers and students. Included are charts for each type where students can keep track of their reading speed and comprehension score.

Appendix 3 is a list of the 128 targeted words in the textbook.

Teachers will find **Unit Review** activities online at www.press.umich.edu/esl/ that provide additional vocabulary activities, more opportunities for discussion, and a short reading journal assignment that encourages reflection as students relate the readings to their own experiences.

The goal in this series is to **challenge** students to become more skillful, independent readers and to provide a strong foundation that will serve them well as they pursue their goals. We welcome any comments or questions at esladmin@umich.edu.