

Introduction for Students

Welcome to the fifth edition of *Reader's Choice*. This book has been written to meet the needs of teachers and students in a rapidly changing globalized world. The purpose of this introduction is to acquaint you with the book and with our approach to teaching reading in English to speakers of other languages.

We believe that reading is an active process in which effective readers bring their understanding of the world to bear on text. Whether reading a book or an article, an advertisement or a chart, or surfing the Internet—regardless of the content or form of the material—successful readers rely on an attitude of independence and the coordination of a number of skills and strategies. Efficient readers approach material with goals in mind, and they adjust their behavior accordingly. They develop expectations, and they read to confirm, reject, or adjust those expectations. Most of this is done without conscious attention to the process. The material in *Reader's Choice* gives you practice in this kind of independent, efficient, and critical reading.

We believe *Reader's Choice* is most effective when it is used in situations where curiosity and active participation are encouraged. It is a tool that will help you and your teachers develop a partnership for learning. You will see that we speak directly to students in the directions, exercises, and answer key (now not included in the book). To the extent possible, we have tried to permit you to get to know us and our approach to teaching and learning—and to living. We encourage you to take a playful approach to the readings and exercises in this book and to interact with the book and each other in ways that permit you, as individuals, to develop your own attitude and approach to learning.

When you look at the Contents page you will notice that there are three kinds of units in *Reader's Choice*. The odd-numbered units (1 through 5) contain language skills work. These exercises give you intensive practice in using word-, sentence-, and discourse-level reading strategies. The even-numbered units (2 through 6) contain reading selections that give you the opportunity to use the skills you have learned to interact with and evaluate the ideas of texts. Finally, Unit 7 consists of a longer, more complex reading selection.

Basic language and reading skills are introduced in early units and reinforced throughout the book. The large number of exercises provides opportunities for repeated practice. Do not be discouraged if you do not finish each exercise, if you have trouble answering specific questions, or if you do not understand everything in a particular reading. The purpose of the tasks in *Reader's Choice* is to help improve your problem-solving skills. For this reason, the process of attempting to answer a question is often as important as the answer itself.

Reader's Choice contains exercises that provide practice in both language and reading skills. In this Introduction, we will first provide a description of language skills exercises followed by a description of the reading skills work contained in the book.

Language Skills Exercises

Word Study Exercises

Upon encountering unfamiliar vocabulary in a passage, there are several strategies available to readers. First, you can continue reading, realizing that often a single word will not prevent understanding the general meaning of a selection. If further reading does not solve the problem, you can use one or more of three basic skills to arrive at an understanding of the unfamiliar word. You can use context clues to see if surrounding words and grammatical structures provide information about the unknown word. You can use word analysis to see if understanding the parts of the word leads to an understanding of the word. Or, you can use a dictionary to find an appropriate definition. *Reader's Choice* contains numerous exercises that provide practice in these three skills.

Word Study: Context Clues

Guessing the meaning of an unfamiliar word from **Context Clues** involves using the following kinds of information:

- a. knowledge of the topic about which you are reading
- b. knowledge of the meanings of the other words in the sentence (or paragraph) in which the word occurs
- c. knowledge of the grammatical structure of the sentences in which the word occurs

When these exercises appear in skills units, their purpose is to provide practice in guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words using context clues. Students should not necessarily try to learn the meanings of the vocabulary items in these exercises. The **Vocabulary from Context** exercises that accompany reading selections have a different purpose. Generally the first exercise should be done before a reading selection is begun and used as an introduction to the reading. The vocabulary items have been chosen for three reasons:

- a. because they are fairly common and therefore useful for students to learn
- b. because they are important for an understanding of the passage
- c. because their meanings are not easily available from the context in the selection

Word Study: Stems and Affixes

Another way to discover the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary is to use word analysis, that is, to use knowledge of the meanings of the parts of a word. Many English words have been formed by combining parts of older English, Greek, and Latin words. For instance, the word *bicycle* is formed from the parts *bi*, meaning “two,” and *cycle*, meaning “round” or “wheel.” Often knowledge of the meanings of these word parts (along with context) can help the reader to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Exercises in **Word Study: Stems and Affixes** provide practice in this skill at regular intervals throughout the book. The **Appendix** lists all of the stems and affixes that appear in these exercises.

Word Study: Dictionary Use

Sometimes the meaning of a single word is essential to an understanding of the total meaning of a selection. If context clues and word analysis do not provide enough information, it will be necessary to use a dictionary. The **Word Study: Dictionary Use** exercises in the skills units provide students with a review of the information available from dictionaries and practice in using a dictionary to obtain that information. The **Dictionary Study** exercises that accompany some of the reading selections require students to use the context of an unfamiliar vocabulary item to find an appropriate definition from the dictionary entries provided.

Sentence Study Exercises

Sometimes comprehension of an entire passage requires the understanding of a single sentence. **Sentence Study** exercises give students practice in analyzing the structure of sentences to determine the relationships of ideas within a sentence. You will be presented with a complicated sentence followed by tasks that require analyzing the sentence for its meaning. Often you will be required to use the available information to draw inferences about the author's message.

Paragraph Reading and Paragraph Analysis Exercises

These exercises give you practice at the paragraph level. Some of the paragraph exercises are designed to provide practice in discovering the general message. You will be asked to determine the main idea of a passage: that is, the idea that is the most important, around which the passage is organized. Other paragraph exercises are meant to provide practice in careful, detailed reading. You will be required not only to find the main idea of a passage but also to guess vocabulary from context, to answer questions about specific details in the paragraph, and to draw conclusions based on an understanding of the passage.

Discourse Focus

Effective reading requires the ability to select skills and strategies appropriate to a specific reading task. The reading process involves using information from the full text and knowledge of the world in order to interpret a passage. Readers use this information to make predictions about what they will find in a text and to decide how they will read. Sometimes we need to read quickly to obtain only a general idea of a text; at other times we read carefully, drawing inferences about the intent of the author. Discourse-level exercises introduce these various approaches to reading, which are then reinforced throughout the book. These reading skills are described in more detail in the discussion that follows.

Nonprose Reading

Throughout *Reader's Choice*, nonprose selections (a menu, bus schedule, road map, and charts and graphs) provide practice reading material that is not primarily arranged in sentences and paragraphs. It is important to remember that the same problem-solving skills are used to read both prose and nonprose material.

Reading Skills Exercises

Students will need to use all of their language skills in order to understand the reading selections in *Reader's Choice*. The book contains many types of selections on a wide variety of topics. These selections provide practice in using different reading strategies to comprehend texts. They also give practice in four basic reading skills: **skimming**, **scanning**, **reading for thorough comprehension**, and **critical reading**. An introduction to each of these is presented, with exercises, in Unit 1, and practiced throughout the even-numbered units.

Skimming

Skimming is quick reading for the general idea(s) of a passage. This kind of rapid reading is appropriate when trying to decide if careful reading would be desirable or when there is not time to read something carefully.

Scanning

Like skimming, **scanning** is also quick reading. However, in this case the search is more focused. To scan is to read quickly in order to locate specific information. When you read to find a particular date, name, or number, you are scanning.

Reading for Thorough Comprehension

Reading for thorough comprehension is careful reading in order to understand the full meaning of the passage. At this level of comprehension, the reader is able to summarize the author's ideas but has not yet made a critical evaluation of those ideas.

Critical Reading

Critical reading demands that readers make judgments about what they read. This kind of reading requires posing and answering questions such as, *Does my own experience support that of the author? Do I share the author's point of view? Am I convinced by the author's arguments and evidence?*

Of course, effective readers use combinations of these skills and strategies simultaneously. Systematic use of the exercises and readings in *Reader's Choice* will give you practice in the basic language and reading skills necessary to become a proficient reader. Additional suggestions for the use of *Reader's Choice* in a classroom setting are included in the To the Teacher section on the website: www.press.umich.edu/esl/.

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