

# 11

Comprehension may be regarded as relating what we attend to in the world around us—the visual information of print in the case of reading—to what we already have in our heads. And learning can be considered as modifying what we already have in our heads as a consequence of attending to the world around us.

—Smith 1994, 53

## Teaching Students to Read for Meaning

- *What does it mean to be an engaged reader?*
- *How do EFL/ESL teachers teach beginners to read?*
- *What kinds of reading activities do EFL/ESL teachers use with post-beginners?*
- *How can teachers teach vocabulary in a reading class?*
- *How can teachers use grammar in a reading class?*
- *How can teachers help students to improve their metacognitive reading strategies?*
- *What problems do some EFL/ESL teachers have as reading teachers?*

### What Does It Mean to Be an Engaged Reader?

Engaged readers read for different purposes while processing text into meaning and using a wide variety of skills and strategies.

#### THE PURPOSE OF READING

We read a lot of things and for different purposes! We read some of these alone—for example, the news over morning coffee or tea. We also read things and talk about them with others. For example, we might

read the movie listings to select a film to see or we might read a menu item at a restaurant to the waiter to ask if he or she recommends it. We read some things while sitting, others while walking, and still others while driving. We also read a short story or novel for pleasure, an email or text response to a question we asked a friend, and a blog about food simply to learn something new. In short, we usually have a reason to read.

### PROCESSING WHAT WE READ

Engaged readers also process their reading through bottom-up, or low-level, processing and top-down, or high-level, processing. I discussed these same processes in Chapter 9 on listening comprehension. With reading, these processes are the same but in a visual sense.<sup>1</sup> To comprehend written language, we rely on our ability to recognize words, phrases, and sentences (bottom-up, text-driven processing), as well as on our background knowledge related to the content of what we are reading (top-down or conceptually-driven processing). These two processes interact as we read, resulting in a degree of comprehension.

However, bottom-up reading processing is different from listening in that readers need visual strategies, rather than auditory strategies, to process written syntax (for example, word order) and lexicon (words and the meaning of words). In addition, they need to be able to process orthography (letters), decode words, as well as have an ability to process reading phonology (for example, the intonation used in reading when we read aloud inside our heads or to an audience).

Certainly, the reading process is much more complex than what I introduce here. However, I can provide one very important idea, backed by research findings, about how EFL/ESL students learn to process what they read that can be quite useful to EFL/ESL teachers: Students learn to process what they read by reading. In other words, the more they read, the better they become at processing what they read. This is because as they process text, they build a wider vocabulary, knowledge of the second language, the world, and text types.<sup>2</sup> The implications are that EFL/ESL teachers need to have students read a variety of texts and to read as extensively as possible.

## STRATEGIES USED BY READERS TO COMPREHEND TEXT

Engaged readers also use a wide variety of reading strategies. One definition of **strategies** that I like is N.J. Anderson's. He says that strategies are "the conscious actions that learners take to improve their language learning . . . . Because strategies are conscious, there is active involvement of the L2 learner in their selection and use."<sup>3</sup> As these strategies are active, they are **metacognitive**, which means the reader (in the case of reading strategies) is aware of the strategies he or she is using while reading. However, not all readers, even those who are highly engaged, are aware of the strategies that they use to comprehend text. Further, readers who are not fully engaged and have trouble comprehending text can benefit from learning how to use strategies that help them to read efficiently.

Five metacognitive strategies that engaged readers tend to use are **questioning, predicting, visualizing, summarizing, and making connections**. Later in this chapter I discuss how they can be taught, including a process of awareness-building and a variety of activities that help students to become more engaged readers.

## SKILLS USED TO READ

In addition to the strategies readers use to make sense of print, successful readers also learn basic reading skills.<sup>4</sup> They can **skim** a text to get the general idea of a passage. For example, engaged readers can read a newspaper headline and the first paragraph or two to determine what the story is about and whether they want to read the article. Successful readers can **scan** things they read to locate facts or specific information—for example, to locate a number in the phone book or a file from a list on a computer screen.

Successful readers can also **read for thorough comprehension**. This means they read to understand the total meaning of a passage. This kind of reading is often done in academic and other settings where complete comprehension is necessary. In addition, successful readers can **read critically**. Critical reading requires that readers evaluate what they read and consider whether or not they share the author's point of view or are convinced by the author's argument or position. Finally, successful readers **read extensively**. This means they read broadly in areas of interest, such as mystery novels, or in a field of study, such as history or cooking.

## How Do EFL/ESL Teachers Teach Beginners to Read?<sup>5</sup>

Before being able to skim, scan, read for thorough comprehension, read critically, and read extensively in English, students need opportunities to build their bottom-up processing abilities in the language. In other words, they need time and practice building knowledge of sentence structure and vocabulary, as well as experiencing reading within meaningful contexts.

This can be done in several ways. One way, of course, is to use texts, and there are a number of beginning-level grammar and vocabulary texts on the market. Most of these books include lots of exercises, charts, graphs, illustrations, and photos. Reading texts written for beginners also offer students tightly controlled grammatical structures and vocabulary while providing stories relevant to a particular reading audience (e.g., young adults). (See the Recommended Teacher Resource section.)

EFL/ESL students at the beginning level can also benefit from teacher-created vocabulary-building activities, especially if these activities are based on the students' immediate, or at least felt, needs.

Teachers also create activities that provide contextualized reading experiences. One way is with pen or email pals. Students in one class can write to students in another, or the teacher can link students across schools, even countries. These letters can be handwritten, or, email offers speed and often a fun way for students to communicate. The letters from students become the reading text; when students truly connect, the letters offer students a valuable reading and learning experience. If students' oral skills are more developed than their reading skills, they can generate their own reading texts by recording their life stories, which the teacher and a digital program can transcribe and edit. These stories then become reading material for the students.

## What Kinds of Reading Activities Do EFL/ESL Teachers Use with Post-Beginners?

As students improve their processing abilities, teachers can have them do activities to develop their skills to skim, scan, read for thorough comprehension, read critically, and read extensively and develop their metacognitive reading strategies.

### SKIMMING ACTIVITIES

Readers skim to gain a general impression of a book, story, essay, or article and to determine whether to read it more carefully. The activities<sup>5</sup> illustrate ways that students can practice this. The first example (Figure 11.1) asks the reader to skim a passage and then identify the best title.<sup>6</sup>

A second example of a skimming activity is more extended; students are given a topic and expected to select relevant books, websites articles, and other reading materials. To prepare, the teacher collects reading materials on a variety of narrowed topics, such as sports of Chinese origin, Italian fashion, computer games, and travel in Eastern Europe. The teacher also adds readings (comprising about half the total readings) on closely related topics, such as sports in Latin America, New York fashion, computer programs used in business, and travel in Western Europe. The teacher sets up the class library, asks each student to select a specific topic from a list, and has students locate and skim readings from the class library, searching for readings on their topic. The idea is to see how many of the topic-specific readings the student can discover.

### SCANNING ACTIVITIES

While skimming is quick reading to find the general idea, scanning is quick reading to locate specific information.<sup>7</sup> For example, we scan catalogs, dictionaries, event calendars, book indexes, menus, a wide variety of print on the internet—basically any source in which we need to locate specific information.

#### FIGURE 11.1: The Best Title

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Read the passage quickly. Then select the best title.

Mary Ashworth couldn't believe it! She had purchased a lottery ticket six months ago, put it in her wallet, and forgot about it. One day while at the store, she found the ticket and decided to see if she had won. To her amazement, she had won the top prize of two million dollars! She remarked enthusiastically, "I really couldn't believe it! I almost threw the ticket away without checking to see if I won anything!"

Which title is best?

- |                             |                    |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| a. The Good Shopper         | c. Six Months Ago  |
| b. The Lucky Lottery Winner | d. The Lost Wallet |
-

Another way to give students practice with scanning is to have a contest. Students form teams, and each student receives a handout that includes facts. I sometimes use fact sheets on different countries—for example, on China’s 14 coastal port cities. Equipped with a long list of questions and answers, the teacher throws a question out to the class. The first team to answer the question correctly gets two points. If a team gets the answer wrong, it loses a point. The team with the most points wins.

Another scanning activity is an internet scavenger hunt.<sup>8</sup> The teacher prepares a list of questions that the students are asked to answer using the internet. For example, the teacher could ask students to go to a website on world populations and to find out how many people live in different countries or major cities. Likewise, the teacher could send students to a website on dog breeds to find out what the most popular breed of dog is in different countries. Students then can use a search engine to look up each question and scan the website they have selected to find the answers to each of the questions. When I do this activity, I like to ask students to prepare scanning questions for classmates (and the website addresses and answers for me). I then use the student-generated questions during the scavenger hunt/contest.

### READING FOR THOROUGH COMPREHENSION: ACTIVITIES

Unlike skimming and scanning, activities that aim at having students read for thorough comprehension require them to read meticulously. The goal is for the students to understand the total meaning of a reading selection, and there are a number of techniques teachers can use to get students to interact with the reading material:

- Students study the title and skim to capture the main idea.
- Students read two paragraphs and predict what will follow.
- Students do several different scanning tasks, such as underlining past tense verbs in red and adverbs indicating sequence (e.g., *first*, *second*, *next*, etc.) in blue, circling words they do not recognize, and putting stars next to words that seem important. After each task, they briefly discuss what they underlined, circled, or starred.

- After students have a sense of what the reading material is about, they read silently while answering true-false or multiple choice questions.
- Students meet in groups, consider the text, write down questions, and give them to another group to answer.
- Students draw pictures of the main characters in a story or draw pictures that illustrate the storyline.
- Students, working in groups, reconstruct material previously cut into pieces (also called a jigsaw task).
- Students read a story with the conclusion missing, then write their own endings.
- Students give the reading material a new title.
- Students put a set of pictures or photos in order to show the storyline or content.
- Students meet in groups to summarize an article and to separate main ideas from supporting ideas and examples.
- Students listen to the teacher discuss how the piece of writing is organized.

This list illustrates some of the activities teachers use in reading classes, and there are, of course, other ways to teach reading, as well as ways to creatively combine a number of reading activities into a single lesson. And it is through such a combination of activities that students have opportunities to read thoroughly. With this in mind, here is a reading lesson I designed for a lower-intermediate ESL class, including a story I wrote and a combination of activities. Through this example, I encourage you to write your own stories and activities for students in your classes.

My wife, Yoko, and I got up very early on Saturday. We had a busy day ahead of us. Before leaving the house, we shut the windows. Then we noticed our cat, Kiku, sitting comfortably on a chair. “This won’t do,” Yoko said. “We better put Kiku outside for the day.”

Yoko said goodbye to Kiku just before she got into the car. The cat didn’t look happy. He wanted to go back into the house to rest comfortably on the chair! But this was impossible. At least, this is what we thought!

We then drove to see my mother at a retirement home. But my mother wasn't home. So we walked in the garden. Yoko spent some time at the small white fountain in the middle of the garden.

After we walked in the garden, we drove to the countryside to join relatives at a family reunion. Yoko talked with Aunt Nita and my cousin Ann for a long time. She also talked with Uncle Gene, who always seems to be wearing white slacks and shoes.

We left the reunion early to go to a wedding party. Our friend Agnes is from Poland, and she married her childhood sweetheart, Wojtek. They had a wonderful time, although they missed their families in Poland on such an important day.

Finally, late at night, we went home. And guess what! We found Kiku in the hall of the house! How did that cat do that!?

Here are the activities students completed:

- Students answered questions before they read (e.g., *How many of you have ever had a cat as a pet? How many cats? What do cats like to do?*).
- Students studied a blown-up photo of Kiku the cat next to a drawing of a chrysanthemum while listening to an explanation about the meaning of Kiku's Japanese name, meaning chrysanthemum.
- Students looked at the reading while tracing some of the script with their finger, spelling out words. As a class, they wrote the same words in the air with their index fingers.
- Students looked for words they had studied the week before, such as *fountain, garden, and countryside*.
- Students underlined verbs in the past tense, and then counted the number of past tense verbs.
- Each student read the story silently and responded true or false to such statements as (1) Kiku is a dog, (2) Yoko and her husband visited three places, (3) Yoko and her husband visited his mother after going to a picnic.
- While in groups, students read each paragraph together and then had one person in each group summarize it.



- After students finished reading the summaries, they arranged seven drawings into the same order as the events in the story.
- As a group, students answered the following question: *How did Kiku get back in the house?* Then each group gave their answer to the whole class.
- As a class, students gave the story possible titles while the teacher wrote them on the board.

### CRITICAL READING

There are at least three things to remember when asking students to do critical reading. First, students still need to do the kinds of activities that lead to full comprehension, as discussed earlier. Second, students need to make judgments about what they read: *Do I agree with the author's point of view? How is my view different? Does the author persuade me to change my view? Is the author's evidence strong?* Third, we need to be careful about what we ask students to make judgments on. In other words, we need to select content that is not only interesting to the students as readers, but also something they can relate to. For example, young adults from Japan, Mexico, and California will likely be more interested in reading and giving opinions about earthquake survival than will people in places not affected by earthquakes. Likewise, young students are apt to have better-informed opinions about popular rock stars and youth fashion than the average adult would.

### EXTENSIVE READING

The goal of extensive reading is to improve reading skills by processing a quantity of materials that can be comprehended and pleasurable. Teachers who implement extensive reading set up an open library (in the classroom or school library) where students can select from an assortment of reading materials.<sup>9</sup> The teacher's job is to guide the reader to materials that are comprehensible, letting the students make their own choices.

As a part of the extensive reading experience, teachers often ask students to report on what they have read. One way to do this is to have students interview each other through the use of question prompts. For

example, if a student reads a short story, the question prompts might include:<sup>10</sup>

- What is the story title?
- What kind of short story is it?
- Did you like the story?
- Why did you like it, or why not?
- Would you recommend the story?
- Who is the story's author?
- What is the main message in the story?

Another activity, which can be fun for students, is to ask them to write a letter to one of the characters in a story they read.<sup>11</sup> After selecting one of the characters, the students write a letter that focuses on agreeing or disagreeing with something the character did or said or lists questions that the readers would like to ask the character related to the book. Another creative idea is to engage students in thinking about what happens in a sequel to a story they read. The teacher can ask them to think about what might happen later to the main characters.<sup>12</sup>

## How Can Teachers Teach Vocabulary in a Reading Class?

Vocabulary is important. Without it we cannot understand the intended meaning of the writer. With this in mind, reading teachers can provide ESL/EFL readers with opportunities to increase their active vocabulary by following basic guidelines along with corresponding activities.<sup>13</sup> First, teach beginners high-frequency words. They are not difficult to find. Simple Google searches of the 1,000 most frequently used words in American English conversations, the 2,000 most frequently used words in English academic journals, or the most frequently used adjectives in English will reap results. Many of the wordlists have been generated from the use of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or another corpus research base (see Chapter 6). Further, if you want to do your own search, COCA is free.

Second, these frequently used words merit continuous attention. As such, I like to think of teaching vocabulary as a process of (1) introducing a word or set of words, (2) following up with a detailed study of the word or words, and (3) lots of contextual practice to reinforce and expand students' understanding of the word(s). The goal constantly on my mind is that students will be able to "call up the meaning of a word as it is recognized" when they read, something that reading theorists call **lexical access**.<sup>14</sup>

The brief introduction of words that I give is often before students read, but I sometimes have them read first and tell me what words they want to study. I do this when I think the class will understand much of the passage or I do this simply out of curiosity. I do not take much time to introduce new word. One reason is because students quite often simply forget a word the first time they are exposed to it (unless it is especially meaningful). Another reason is that long explanations about what words mean can bore the students. I have observed too many teachers take 20 minutes of a reading class to try to explain what the vocabulary words mean when all the students really needed was a quick translation or a picture or a few questions to get them started. Since I want students to spend much of the class reading, I save a more detailed study of the words for a time after they have read and comprehended the passage at some level.

The more detailed study of vocabulary includes asking students to analyze and expand their understanding of these words. Here are a few activities that can help the students expand their understanding of words.<sup>15</sup> The first asks students to analyze a new word by looking at the prefixes, roots or bases, and suffixes. For example, if the word is *redo*, we can ask them what *re* means, as well as create a list of things we sometimes do again, such as homework, an essay, or makeup, as well as think up other words with the prefix *re-*, such as *rethink*, *reorganize*, and *revise*. If the word is *preview*, we can ask them what *pre-* means, what the base is, and what it means. We can follow that up with listing things we can preview, such as movies, TV shows, a new computer commercial, as well as think up other words that have the same prefix, such as *precaution*, *precede*, or *preapprove*. Likewise, if the word is *endless*, we can ask what the root or base of the word is, as well as what the suffix means ("without"). If the students are ready, we could ask them to think of other words with same suffix, such as

*effortless, ageless, and lawless.* If there are two words: *protector* and *announcer*, we can ask them to identify the suffixes (*or* and *er*) and tell them it means “one who,” for example “one who protects.” The students can also come up with example words with *-er* or *-or*, such as *swimmer, basketball player, and teacher*, as well as make up short sentences, such as *I am a swimmer* or *I swim everyday*.

Another activity is to ask students to identify synonyms. The choice and number of words depends on the level of the student and words they have already studied. The idea here is to give them practice with studying words they have already been introduced to in their reading passages, as well as strengthening their sight vocabulary (words they know as soon as they see them). Figure 11.2 shows an example activity.

The same kind of activity can be done with antonyms, as shown in Figure 11.3.

An activity I have used throughout my years of teaching in to are students to write their own dictionary.<sup>16</sup> Some authors and publishers call this a **vocabulary log**. I have found this is especially helpful for some beginning students. In the past I had them use index cards, a hole punch, and a metal rings. More recently students like to use an iPad or computer. The advantage of using index cards or an iPad is easy access. The idea behind asking students to write their own dictionaries is they will need to analyze and

**FIGURE 11.2: Identifying Synonyms**

The word is *strong*. Which words have the same meaning? Circle six words.

happy   robust   solid   poor   late   angry   beautiful   nutritious  
tough   angry   tired   wealthy   weak   sturdy   durable   resilient

**FIGURE 11.3: Identifying Antonyms**

The word is *strong*. Which words have the opposite meaning? Circle six words.

sad   frail   solid   poor   fragile   angry   creative   tired  
tough   hardy   tired   sturdy   weak   unsteady   durable   funny

**FIGURE 11.4: An Example Dictionary Entry – Beginner**

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Happy – feel good. adjective

Sad – feel unhappy.

I am happy. She is a happy person. Happy Birthday



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think about the word, create a record of the words they are studying, and be able to review them. Besides building the students' reading vocabulary, an additional benefit is that they will sometimes refer to the words they want to use in a conversation or writing assignment both inside and outside of class.

I encourage students to be creative with their dictionaries (see Figure 11.4). During the first few weeks, I include dictionary time in class to teach them how to create their own personalized dictionary. Later, it becomes a homework assignment, and hopefully some of the students will continue to add words and phrases to their dictionaries on their own. Some of the things that I encourage students to include in their dictionaries are: a word they want to remember and use; an easy-to-understand definition; synonyms; the part of speech and different forms of the word (noun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition...); whether the word or words is standard or colloquial/idiomatic English; drawings or photos; example sentences, and anything else that helps them understand the word and be able to recognize the word while reading.

## How Can Teachers Use Grammar in a Reading Class?

Some teachers do not like to use grammar in a reading class because they believe it takes time away from reading. Other teachers are not confident with teaching grammar or have not had much experience studying it and

explaining it. However, it may be worth the effort to help students comprehend the passages they read.

Although grammar can become complex, it also can be an interesting subject to study. Personally, I am happy that I took a few grammar classes, especially those that were taught as a tool for ESL/EFL teachers to use in the classroom. I ended up building on my basic courses and texts, and through the many student-questions I have answered and concepts I have taught throughout my career, I have expanded my grammatical knowledge and have found that an understanding of grammar when teaching reading, as well as other skill areas can be quite useful.

Grammar had been a very important part of teaching reading to ESL and EFL students in the past. For example, the **Grammar Translation method** was used, and is still used to some extent, in reading classrooms around the world. More recently grammar has become a smaller part of teaching reading as it has been replaced by reading activities discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>17</sup> However, teaching grammar can still be useful to students, especially with helping them to comprehend text. In this section I provide some examples of ways that grammar can be possibly beneficial to students who are working on their English reading comprehension.

The basic idea of using grammar in a reading class is to teach students how to analyze the sentences they read in a way to aid comprehension. Some teachers take the time to teach students to identify parts of speech, including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, determiners, and prepositions. One reading activity I learned from Paul Nation<sup>18</sup> is for the teacher to select words from a passage that students are reading and to write them on the board along with the line number. The students then study the passage sentence, find each word, and say whether it is a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb by writing *n.*, *v.*, *adj.*, or *adv.* after it. The words selected for this activity are usually words that can be different parts of speech in dissimilar contexts. Nation points out the value of being able to identify the part of speech of a word in a specified context.<sup>19</sup> First, when trying to guess the meaning of a word from the context, knowing the part of speech of the word will provide extra meaning, such as an adjective before a noun usually means the writer of the passage is modifying or describing the noun in some way, such as in the sentence *She has exceptional talent at playing the piano*. It also makes looking up the word in a dictionary much

easier because the meanings of words are usually classified according to the part of speech of the word.

Another use of grammar is with teaching students to recognize **cohesive devices**. Cohesion means to “interconnect, unify, and interrelate ideas.” When ideas are not cohesive, they are fragmented or disjointed. Grammatically, there are many ways that writers connect ideas, and one basic way is through the use of **coordinating conjunctions**, including *and*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. These words connect two ideas or clauses in specific ways. The use of *and* is adding an idea, such as in *We went to the city on Sunday, and we had a good time*. The use of *but* shows that what follows will introduce something that is true despite being contrary to what was just written, as in *I hate the taste of kale, but I eat it anyway*. The use of *or* connects two (or more) alternatives, such as in *We could go to the movies or watch TV at home*. The use of *yet* is similar to the word *nevertheless*, as in *Some people know they should exercise, yet they don’t exercise much at all*. The use of *so* indicates a reason for an action or situation, or its result, as in *They were late for class, so they walked faster*. It does not take long for beginners to recognize and make use of these conjunctions in their reading and other skills as they have them in their first language. However, being aware of such conjunctions and what they mean make students feel like they are making progress, and I believe helps them to read with more comprehension.

The same is true with **subordinating conjunctions**, which indicate time. These include words such as *when*, *before*, *after*, and *while*, as well as others including *if*, *as if*, *even if*, *as long as*, *whenever*, *although*, *as*, *because*, *rather than*, *in order that*, and more. When students learn to identify a subordinating conjunction, affiliate it with meaning, they have yet one more tool to process the meaning of the text (see Figure 11.5).<sup>20</sup>

Another cohesion lesson is to teach students to identify words that show comparison.<sup>21</sup> Such comparative words include *same*, *similar*, *identical*, *equal*, *different*, *other*, *additional*, *more*, *fewer*, *less*, *adjectives* or *adverbs* + *-er*.<sup>22</sup> Pointing out such words as they compare two or more things can help students understand a passage. Figure 11.6 shows an example of a reading passage and activity that helps students understand comparison. The teacher previously gave an example of a reading passage on a projected slide and circled and discussed words of comparison.

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**FIGURE 11.5: Identifying Subordinate Conjunctions**

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Instructions: Read each sentence. Circle the subordinate conjunction.

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1. When he gets home from school, he checks his email.
  2. He checks his email when he gets home from school.
  3. Although the weather has been exceptionally warm, the woman has been wearing heavy sweaters.
  4. The woman has been wearing heavy sweaters although the weather has been exceptionally warm.
  5. If you had a chance to visit any city in the world, where would you go?
  6. Where would you go if you had a chance to visit any city in the world?
  7. Whenever I give you a lot of reading homework to do over the weekend, some of you groan.
  8. Some of you groan whenever I give you a lot of reading homework to do over the weekend.
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Discussion Questions: What did each subordinate conjunction tell you about time in each sentence? Can a subordinate conjunction go anywhere in the sentence? What punctuation mark do we usually use with the conjunction?

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**FIGURE 11.6: Understanding Comparisons**

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Instructions: Read the passage.<sup>23</sup> Circle the words that show comparison.

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All the states in the U.S. have had some population growth since 2010. The fastest growing state is North Dakota. In 2010 there were 672,591 people. In 2015 there were 756,927. North Dakota grew more than 12%. The populations of Hawaii and North Carolina have almost identical growth. Hawaii grew by 5.24% and North Carolina by 5.32%. However, Hawaii is smaller than North Carolina and has fewer people. Hawaii grew from 1,360,301 to 1,431,603 people living in the state. North Carolina grew from 9,535,483 to 10,042,802 people. North Carolina is not increasing its population faster, but it does have many more people living there than Hawaii.

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Discussion Questions: North Dakota is the fastest-growing state. Its growth is faster than what? Hawaii's growth is almost identical to what state? North Carolina has more people than what state?

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Of course, there are additional ways to use grammar to help students comprehend what they are reading. My goal here is simply to show that grammar can be a useful way to aid student comprehension of text.

## How Can Teachers Help Students to Improve Their Metacognitive Reading Strategies?

As mentioned earlier, engaged readers use a wide variety of reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension. Because these strategies are active, they are **metacognitive**, which means the reader is aware of the strategies he or she is using while reading. Becoming aware of the strategies they use as they learn to read in English is not necessarily easy for all students, and teachers can help them to build their abilities to use metacognitive strategies.

A very systematic way to teach reading strategies is provided by Kelly and Clausen-Grace,<sup>24</sup> who teach students how to build metacognitive awareness. They have a cyclic model that includes four phases: **think-aloud**, **refining strategy use**, **letting strategy-use gel**, and **self-assessment and goal setting**. They also focus on five cognitive strategies as they can use as they go through this process, including **questioning**, **predicting**, **visualizing**, **summarizing**, and **making connections**. Each cognitive strategy is started during a think-aloud session. During this time the teacher models the strategy (e.g., predicting), and the students try to tell the teacher what he or she is doing while reading. For example, when teaching students how to predict, the teacher will say aloud, “I am studying the title. Now I am studying the subtitle to predict what I am going to read.” The instructions teachers follow, as provided by Kelley and Clausen-Grace, are:

1. Introduce, explain, and define the strategy components for students.
2. Apply the strategy components while you read aloud.
3. Ask students to tell you which strategy component you’re using.
4. Clarify the purpose of the strategy.

Gradually, in subsequent lessons, the students can take turns reading aloud. After the strategy use has begun to gel, the majority of the mental work changes to the students, while the teacher and classmates act as coaches during reading times. After several weeks, each student self-reflects and writes a plan centered on one part of the strategy that he or she would like to improve. During silent or group reading time, the teacher provides coaching and reading conferences. The goal is to monitor students' use of their metacognitive strategies as they read independently.

Other teachers are not as systematic, but they do work at helping students become more aware of the metacognitive reading strategies they use. Some of the activities that teachers use that offer students practice with the strategies of questioning, predicting, visualizing, summarizing, and making connections are shown. One such reading activity (Figure 11.7) helps students build their questioning strategy that uses the *think aloud* protocol.<sup>25</sup>

**FIGURE 11.7: Using Think-Aloud to Teach Students How to Ask Questions as They Read**

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1. Select an appropriate text to model the questioning strategy.
2. Explain the strategy to the students. Use a handout or the computer and screen in front of the room to show how the strategy works. Include both the text and the reader's questions to illustrate the think-aloud protocol. Here is an example:

Homelessness in Hawaii is a big problem. (*What kind of big problem?*) Entire families are living in tents in parks and along canals. (*Really? Children, too? Why doesn't the government help them? Can't they find jobs?*) People are homeless because the cost of living is very high in Hawaii, and they don't have enough money to pay for housing. Many homeless work at minimal wage jobs, but they don't make enough money to feed their families, send their children to school, and pay for other needs. Government agencies try to help them find housing, but there are so many restrictions that many families will not accept their help. (*Why not? What kind of restrictions?*)

3. Ask the students to finish reading the article and then to stop and list questions they have as they read.
  4. Group students and ask them to read the text aloud along with their questions.
-

Another metacognitive reading activity, created by Suzanne Boon, provides students with practice making predictions. She asks students to consider internet news websites with which they are familiar. She then passes out pre-reading questions that students can apply to the news. These questions include: What do you already know about this topic? Looking at the news column heading, what do you believe the story might be about? Write at least three ideas. If there are pictures, what do they show? What do you think the story is about based on the pictures.<sup>26</sup> She then asks the students to read the article to see if their predictions match the content of the article and asks them to discuss whether their predictions were true, and if so, what parts of the text and pictures helped them to prove their predictions.

Another metacognitive reading strategy is to have students tap into their senses as they read<sup>27</sup> (see Figure 11.8). I have used this strategy for many years and find that some students have fun drawing the storyline

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**FIGURE 11.8: Using Our Senses as We Read**

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1. Select reading material that is easy for students to read. This could be a descriptive essay, short story, or poem.
  2. Ask students what our senses are: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching.
  3. Read the essay or story aloud. Ask students to close their eyes as you read. Also ask them to use their senses—to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch—as they listen to the story.
  4. Ask the students to read the story silently, and as they do to draw what they see, as well as write down words that represent what they smell, taste, and hear. For example, if the reading is about camping in the wilderness, the reader might smell and taste smoke, hear insects and a river flowing, and hear the voice of the character or characters.
  5. Give students a chance to recreate their drawing and words onto a separate piece of paper and to show it to classmates.
  6. Ask students to read again silently, this time applying their senses to the content.
  7. Ask students if they felt differently about reading while using their senses, and if so how it was different. For example, some students say they could see more and hear the narrator's voice and even smell things within the setting.
-

and creating voices for characters in a story or assigning a voice for the author in a descriptive essay, as well as using their other senses in creative ways. Many have said that by tapping into their senses they improve their comprehension, too.

Students can also learn to summarize what they read. This metacognitive strategy helps them to realize if they comprehend. It also helps them to further process what they have read to make sense out of it if they have not fully comprehended the passage. Sometimes I like to have students write a short summary of what they have read. If their classmates are also reading the same story or article, I ask them to read each other's summaries and write comments or add to the summary. When I do this, I ask students to create a pen name that only they know. I then have them put their summaries in a pile and ask them to randomly pick summaries to read. The pen names hide the identity of the student. If some students have a problem with comprehension and summarizing, then they won't be embarrassed, and classmates who do comprehend and can write detailed summaries sometimes feel freer to write productive comments and fill in gaps in the summary.

Richard Day offers another way for students to practice summarizing through jigsaw reading.<sup>28</sup> He selects an article that is fairly easy for the students to read. He then cuts some of the material into paragraphs or sections. He then divides the class into groups and gives each person in the group a different paragraph or section to read. After they read, he asks them to take turns summarizing their paragraph/section and then to put the paragraphs/sections into the correct order. He then asks each group to read the entire article and to create a verbal summary. A volunteer then summarizes the article aloud to the other students.

Another metacognitive reading comprehension strategy is being able to identify transition words in the text, and S. Kathleen Kitao offers an activity for students to practice identifying and giving meaning to words that connect ideas.<sup>29</sup> She begins by teaching transition words and their connected meaning. For example, she teaches students words to recognize when additional information is being added (*and, furthermore, moreover, in addition, also*), words that show consequence (*so, therefore, as a result, as such*), words that show cause and effect (*due to, because, on account of, as a result*), words that show contrast (*however, but, although*), words that provide order (*first, second, next*), and more. She shows these connecting

words in a passage that students read and study. Following this she gives students a new passage. She then uses think-aloud (discussed on pages 217–218) to illustrate each of the connecting words and their meaning. Here is my own example of what this think aloud activity might be:

Yoko grew up in a busy bright noisy city in Japan. *As such*, (consequence transition) she was both excited and scared when she visited a mountain resort. It was a dark wooded place. The dark woods disturbed her. She never experienced such darkness before. *Moreover*, (additional information) the sounds of the woods frightened her. Even the sound of squirrels running on the roof startled her, *and* (additional information) the sound of the wind in the trees worried her. *As a result*, (consequence) during the first night there, she turned on all the bedroom lights and hid under her bedcovers.

After doing the think aloud activity, Kitao gave students another reading passage and asked them to identify each connecting word and type of transition. She also gave students a handout with the transitions deleted from it and asked them to fill in the blanks and to identify the transition type.

## What Problems Do Some EFL/ESL Teachers Have as Reading Teachers?

Problems some EFL/ESL teachers face include:

- The “intermediate-level slump” problem
- The “background knowledge” problem
- The “getting students to read” problem

### THE “INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL SLUMP” PROBLEM

At an intermediate level of language proficiency, EFL/ESL readers quite often hit an **intermediate-level slump**.<sup>30</sup> This is because they have learned basic reading skills by reading dialogues in textbooks, short stories with limited introductory vocabulary, and directions in a text or a printout. Once these conventions of reading have been studied and become easier,

readers start using information-based texts, which opens up learning to very large amount of language. Not only are students exposed to enormous amounts of new vocabulary but also more complicated rhetoric, expository style, and more. As N.J. Anderson puts this, learning to read is like an “inverted pyramid. As students achieve higher levels of language proficiency, there is an increase in the amount of material available to learn.”<sup>31</sup>

This intermediate stage is frustrating for some students. As they began learning to read, progress was quick. They could complete basic tasks successfully and felt like they were learning. However, when faced with larger and larger amounts of reading material, the process slows down, and students feel like they have stopped learning.

When students experience intermediate-level slump, the teacher needs to encourage them, but more than this, teachers need to provide tasks that students can accomplish. For example, students can learn to read personal emails, articles on familiar matters, and more advanced narratives. At this stage teachers can teach them ways to expand their reading vocabulary, involve them in identifying main ideas, scan, and differentiate between facts and opinions. Further, N.J. Anderson offers this advice: “Perhaps the greatest mistake that a teacher can make at this level is to expect too much from the readers. This is not to suggest that teachers should not have high expectations but that those expectations should be focused on moving the reader from learning to read to reading to learn.”<sup>32</sup>

### THE “BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE” PROBLEM

Students’ ability to comprehend the content of reading material depends in part on their knowledge about the topic of the reading selection. To increase students’ potential comprehension, the teacher can lead a variety of pre-reading activities that build background knowledge.

One activity is to have a short discussion about the topic. For example, the teacher might lead off discussion with the following set of questions before asking students to read an article on the lifestyles of sumo wrestlers: *How many of you have ever watched sumo on TV? What happens during a match? What are some of the rules in sumo? What do you know about the lifestyles of sumo wrestlers?* If time is limited, written reading previews

could be used. Similar to a movie preview, a reading preview introduces the student to the main idea of the reading. Pictures, sketches, or photographs can also be used to introduce the topic of a reading.

Another pre-reading activity is to take a field trip to a historical or cultural site or event or to watch a film or video clip about the topic of the future reading. For example, students could watch part of a videotaped sumo match and view a short documentary on the lives of famous contemporary sumo wrestlers.

### THE “GETTING STUDENTS TO READ” PROBLEM

In some EFL/ESL teaching settings, students do not necessarily value reading. It is a constant struggle for teachers to get students to read in and out of class. When faced with such an attitudinal or motivational problem, teachers are often at a loss about what to do.

Although there is no single or simple way to change students’ attitudes toward reading, there are things teachers can try.<sup>33</sup> First, we can begin with the following assumption: “People learn better when what they are studying has considerable meaning for them . . . when it really comes out of their own lives . . . when it is something that they can in some way commit themselves to or invest themselves in.”<sup>34</sup> Second, we can work at discovering what brings meaning to the life of each student in our classes. We can do this by observing students: What do they talk about? Show interest in? Carry around with them? Some nonreaders will read if the reading matches their interest, such as learning to develop photos or learning to cook. When given the right conditions, problem readers will spend time reading because they have an invested interest in learning something they consider to be important or useful.

Third, we can do our best to introduce students to readings that match their interests, mostly through extensive reading activities. By putting together a collection that includes the readings and content in which students express interest, we can most easily guide students toward materials that interest them. Such a collection for adults might include mysteries, how-to books, old letters, grammar books, catalogs, sports magazines, poems, forms, menus, academic books, and adventure stories.

## TEACHER SELF-DEVELOPMENT TASKS

### *Talk Tasks*

1. Meet with a friend. Work through the following steps:
  - a. Make a list of materials that students can use to practice scanning.
  - b. Locate one of these materials.
  - c. Create a scanning activity.
2. Meet with a friend. Work through these steps:
  - a. Locate a reading passage. If you are now teaching a reading class, you might want to select material you plan to teach or are required to teach.
  - b. Study the list (given earlier in this chapter) of techniques teachers can use to have students interact with reading materials.
  - c. Based on the list of techniques to have students interact with reading materials, and on your own creative ideas, generate a reading lesson that contains at least five different reading activities to help students process the passage you selected.
  - d. Find others who have done this same activity. Give each other copies of your lesson plans.
3. Study the discussion and activities on teaching students to use metacognitive reading strategies. What does “metacognitive” mean? Which strategies do you use as a reader?
4. Study the example metacognitive reading strategies discussed in this chapter. Select one, and with a partner, brainstorm ways to teach this strategy to EFL/ESL students.
5. Do you agree that teaching students grammar can help students improve their reading skills? Explain.

### *Observation and Talk Task*

1. Try one of the reading lessons created in Talk Task 1 or 2. Record the lesson. Then select three two-minute sections from the tape to listen to. As you listen, note alternative ways you could teach the same aspect of the lesson.



### ***Journal Writing Tasks***

1. Study the activity types discussed in this chapter. Which do you like the most? Why? Which types have you used as a teacher or experienced as a learner?
2. Write about your experiences in learning to read a second language.
3. Select one of the problems from the section What Problems Do Some EFL/ESL Teachers Have as Reading Teachers? Write about why this is a problem for some teachers, and perhaps for yourself as a teacher.
4. Write about teaching students to improve their metacognitive reading strategies.

## **RECOMMENDED TEACHER RESOURCES**

### ***Professional Readings on Teaching Reading***

- Anderson, N.J. “Developing Engaged Second Language Readers” In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.*, eds. M. Celce-Murcia, D.M. Brinton, and M.A. Snow, 170–87. Boston: Heinle Cengage, 2012.
- Birch, B.M. *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom*. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002.
- Day, R.R., ed. *New Ways in Teaching Reading*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2012.
- Day, R.R. *Teaching Reading*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2015.
- Grabe, W. and F.L. Stoller. “Teaching Reading for Academic Purposes” In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.*, eds. M. Celce-Murcia, D.M. Brinton, and M.A. Snow, 189–207. Boston: Heinle Cengage, 2012.
- Mikulecky, B.S. *A Short Course in Teaching Reading: Practical Techniques for Building Reading Power*. White Plains, NY: Pearson, 2011.
- Vaille, B. and J. Quinn Williams. *Creating Book Clubs in the English Language Classroom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

### ***Professional Books on Teaching and Learning Vocabulary***

- Folse, K. *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Lessard-Clouston, M. *Teaching Vocabulary*, Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2015.
- Nation, I.S.P. *Teaching Vocabulary: Strategies and Techniques*. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2008.
- Nation, I.S.P. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Nation, I.S.P. and S. Webb. *Researching and Analyzing Vocabulary*. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2011.

### ***Select Textbooks for Reading Classes***

- Lockwood, R.B. and K. Sippell. *4 Point: Reading for Academic Purposes*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Silberstein, S., B.K. Dobson, and M.A. Clarke. *Choice Readings*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Silberstein, S., B.K. Dobson, and M.A. Clarke. *Reader's Choice, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Smith-Palinkas, B. and K. Croghan-Ford. *Key Concepts: Reading and Writing Across the Disciplines*. Boston: National Geographic Learning, 2009.
- Zemach, D. *Building Academic Reading Skills, Book 1 (2nd ed.) & 2*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009, 2016.
- Zwier, L.J. and M.S. Weltig. *Mastering Academic Reading*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

### ***Textbooks Series with Emphasis on Combining Reading with Other Skills***

- Boardman, C.A. and L. Barton. *Challenges: Reading and Vocabulary for Academic Success, Books 1–3*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Broukal, M. *Weaving it Together: Connecting Reading and Writing, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Volumes 1–4*. Boston: National Geographic Learning, 2016.
- Browne, C., B. Culligan, and J. Phillips. *In Focus: A Vocabulary, Reading, and Critical Thinking Skills Course, Books 1–3*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Folse, K., series ed. *Four Point: Reading and Writing: English for Academic Purposes (3 levels)*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Smith, L. C., and N. M. Mare. *Reading for Today, Books 1–5*. Boston: National Geographic ELT, 2017.
- Williams, J. D. Wiese, J. McEntire, J. Williams, K.J. Pakenhan, and P. Vittorio. *Making Connections: Skills and Strategies for Academic Success*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 Many sources address second language reading processes. Some include Birch (2002), Carrell, Devine, and Eskey (1988), Day (2015), Grabe (2009), and Peregoy and Boyle (2012).
- 2 See Day and Bamford (1998) and Krashen (1988, 1993).
- 3 N.J. Anderson (2005:757). Also see N.J. Anderson (2014:173).
- 4 The way I categorize reading skills is consistent with Day (2012c), Grellet (1981), Mikulecky (2011), and Silberstein, Dobson, and Clarke (2008).
- 5 In a book of this scope, I can only give a few example activities. Other activities can be found in Day (2012c), Grellet (1981), and in published EFL/ESL reading texts.
- 6 The idea for this activity came from Grellet (1981, 69–70). The passage and titles are my own.

- 7 Silberstein, Dobson, and Clarke (2008), Day (2012c), and Grellet (1981) provide an abundance of ideas on how to teach scanning skills.
- 8 This idea is from Parks (2012).
- 9 Graded readers (Beginner through Intermediate) for children and adults can be a part of the extensive library materials.
- 10 These prompts were designed by Kluge (1993), who also offers procedures for setting up and carrying out interviews. See Day (2012c, pages 3–46).
- 11 This activity was created by L.P. Day (2012).
- 12 This activity was created by R.R. Day (2012b).
- 13 The guidelines for teaching vocabulary in a reading class have been derived from reading Coxhead (2014), Folse (2004), Grabe and Stoller (2011), Farrell (2009), Nation (2009), and my own experience with teaching ESL and EFL students to read.
- 14 Grabe and Stoller (2011:15).
- 15 Similar activities are in Coxhead (2014), Day (2015), and Farrell (2009).
- 16 I first learned about having students create their own dictionaries from John Fanselow (personal communication) in the early 1980s. Folse (2004) uses the term *vocabulary log* to express the same idea.
- 17 Ur (2016) discusses arguments for and against using grammar to teach English.
- 18 Nation (2009).
- 19 Nation (2009:40).
- 20 See Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman (2015) for a full list of subordinate conjunctions.
- 21 Halliday and Hasan (1976) discuss comparison in English.
- 22 Nation (2009:45).
- 23 I wrote this passage. My source for the content was [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org), List of U.S. States by Population Growth Rate.
- 24 See Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2007).
- 25 This activity is an adaptation from Pritchard and Van Vleet (2012).
- 26 See Boon (2012:92–93).
- 27 This is my own original activity.
- 28 See Day (2012a).
- 29 See Kitao (2012).
- 30 N.J. Anderson (2014) elaborates on the intermediate-level slump and characteristics of engaged readers. I highly appreciate his knowledge.
- 31 See N.J. Anderson (2014:171).
- 32 See N.J. Anderson (2014:172).
- 33 The three ways are also discussed in my article “Teaching Reading through Assumptions about Learning” (Gebhard 1985).
- 34 See Stevick (1978, 40).