READING IN ENGLISH

Read for the story

Have you ever understood every word you’ve read, but not understood the whole story? As frustrating as this is, it tells us something important about reading: when we read, we need more than just good vocabulary.

To improve how you read:

1 Develop basic concepts first
2 Read often and widely
3 Use active reading techniques

1 Develop basic concepts first

To understand more challenging concepts in a new area, it helps to become familiar with basic concepts first. This way you can link new ideas to what you already know.

Before reading complex texts on a new topic, try reading simpler ones on the same topic first.

2 Read often and widely

The more you read, the more you’ll learn how people think and what topics are important in different contexts.

You might also enjoy reading ‘parallel texts’.

Parallel texts have two languages arranged side by side.

3 Use active reading techniques

Begin reading with a ‘two-minute test’

When you’ve got a lot to read, try the ‘two minute test’. Scan (quickly look through) to identify passages of most interest to you. Decide which bits (if any) you need to read in depth.

Skim, question and predict

Glance at headings, introductions, conclusions and visuals. Ask questions based on these; then predict answers to the questions you’ve asked.

Don’t worry if your questions aren’t perfect or your answers correct. The purpose of these is simply to keep you alert as you read.

Chunk, guess and link

Try to read in chunks, taking in whole phrases (groups of words) rather than focusing on individual words. When words are unfamiliar, guess!

At the end of sections, pause for a moment. Ask yourself how what you are reading now relates to what you’ve just read.

Note ideas, relationships and reflections

Annotate (take notes on the text) or write separate notes to improve your understanding.

Use symbols (e.g. ticks, crosses, question marks and arrows) to capture your own reflections and to show relationships between ideas.

Think big; think in English

Focus on the big picture and main message as you read. Only look up words if they recur frequently and interfere with your general understanding.

If you do need to look up a word, use an English dictionary rather than a bilingual one. You’ll think in English that way, and will learn many more words.
Try these on your own

**What’s in the news?**

1. Cut or print out several news articles.
2. Separate the headings from the articles.
3. Then try to predict what the news articles are about by reading only the headings.
4. Match the headings to the articles, checking whether your predictions were correct.

**Find topic sentences**

1. Read only the first sentence of a paragraph.
2. Write down what you think the topic of the paragraph is, i.e. what it is about.
3. Then read the other sentences in the paragraph.
4. Check whether your predictions were correct.

**Topic and message**

1. Read only sentence beginnings in a paragraph, stopping at verbs.
2. Then write down what you think the paragraph is about.
3. Read only the ending of sentences (after the verbs).
4. Then write down the key message for the paragraph (what it is saying).

**Read between the lines**

1. Read a short article, noting main points and how they’re connected.
2. Ask yourself whether all the connections are logical. Are any links missing?
3. Find examples and evidence to support each main point. Are any unsupported?
4. Consider other ways the article might have been written. In whose interest was it to write it this way?

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