

English
for
academic
study:

sample unit

Reading

Course Book

John Slaght and Paddy Harben

Book map

| Topic | Skills focus |
|-------|--|
| † | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economics focus: On the move <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deciding if a text is useful: predicting content• Word building from a text• Identifying the organization of a text: analyzing a text to establish the purpose• Writing a summary of part of the text: complete a gap-fill model• Dealing with unknown vocabulary: identifying word classes and relative importance of lexis• Evaluating the level of content: identifying writer's attitude from a range of options• Reading for a purpose: identifying whether a text is suitable for the reader's purpose• Reviewing reading styles: reflecting on activities of the unit |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The influence of class size on academic achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Predicting text content: reflecting on personal experience• Reading for a purpose: predicting content• Reading selectively: identifying whether a text contains useful information• Identifying the writer's purpose• Understanding referencing in texts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A case study: Shining star• Reading a text for closer understanding (1): activities to encourage close reading <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Asian paradox: Huge class sizes, high scores• Reading a text for closer understanding (2): activities to promote close reading• Thinking critically about the text: reflect on outcome of reading the three texts• Making use of the text: complete a written assignment |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction between nature and nurture <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessing background knowledge: predicting content based on personal experience• Vocabulary development• Reading for general understanding: skim read to answer global questions• Developing further understanding• Understanding the main argument: identify the best summary• Note-taking from the text: summarizing specific aspects of the text• Developing understanding of the text: understanding sequences of events• Working with words from the text: classify words and discuss their relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capacities of the newborn• Pre-reading discussion• Inferring meaning from the text• Summarizing information from the text (1)• Summarizing information from the text (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hearing, taste and smell• Using background knowledge• Reading for a purpose and creating a summary |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acid rain in Norway <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raising text awareness: activities to elicit personal experience of topic• Taking information from displayed information: using headings, illustrations, etc.• Writing a global summary: compare individual work with model summary <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skylarks in decline• More global summary practice: compare individual work with model summary |

Topic

Skills focus

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sense of experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is statistics? • Descriptive and inferential statistics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics in practice: awareness raising about the topic • Identifying main and supporting points: read and compare answers • Continuing to identify main and minor points: read and compare answers • Summarizing key points (1): complete a gap-fill model • Summarizing key points (2): complete a gap-fill model • Concentrating on the main points: read and write main points • Note-taking practice: take notes or annotate text in preparation for writing • Recalling information from the text: write a short summary |
| <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-textual information • Common questions about climate change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are human activities contributing to climate change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What human activities contribute to climate change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overviewing the text: using extra-textual information and the text introduction • Writing into reading: compare own notes with information from the text • Identifying topic sentences • Understanding the general meaning of a text: develop understanding of text organization as a means of extracting an overview • Topic sentences and supporting sentences: read and identify main points and supporting details • Recalling the text: summarize in writing • Identifying relevant information in a text: find key points and evaluate relevance of text • Detailed reading: read and complete a summary • Recalling the text from memory: write notes from memory • Making use of figures and tables: relate display information to sections of the text • Reading displayed information: relate display information to sections • Inferring meaning from a text: infer meaning and include in a summary • Making use of a text: prepare oral presentation or written assignment |
| <p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • The shrinking planet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic globalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community & conflict • The sharing of sovereignty • Converging or diverging? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-reading discussion • Checking predictions • Thinking about the topic • Recalling the text from memory • Checking the text for details • Making use of the text content • Reading for a purpose • Asking questions about the text • Identifying key information in the text • Preparing to complete the Focus task • Thinking about the topic • Developing understanding of the text • Identifying relevant information for the Focus task • Completing an assignment |
| <p>7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new linguistic order | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciding how to read a text • Reading an introductory case study • Understanding subject-specific vocabulary • Predicting content to help understanding • Selecting relevant information from the text • Fulfilling your reading purpose |



Introduction

In this course you will be working on four main aspects of academic reading:

- reading for a specific academic purpose;
- working on effective reading strategies;
- detailed comprehension of sentences and paragraphs;
- text analysis.

1. Reading for a specific academic purpose

Here you will be concentrating on getting information from the text which will help you complete an academic task. For example, you may need to:

- complete an assignment on a specific question, for which it is necessary to combine information from various sources;
- get an introductory overview of a new topic in order to assist with listening to a series of lectures on that topic;
- add new knowledge about a topic to what you already know. This could be, for example, note-taking for future exam revision or simply reading a text and thinking about what you have read in order to understand the topic better.

2. Working on effective reading strategies

The main strategies we will be looking at are:

● Skimming

This involves **looking at a text quickly** in order to do one or more of the following:

- Identify what the text is about (the topic)
- Identify the main idea of the text
- Decide how useful the text is for your purposes
- Decide how you will make use of the text

Skimming a text might involve looking at some or all of the following features of the text:

- Title
- Section headings
- Abstract or summary provided by the writer
- First and last paragraphs
- First and last sentences of intervening paragraphs
- Topic sentences in each paragraph (see also Glossary: paragraph leaders)

Another form of skimming is when you are previewing a book in order to decide how useful it is for your purposes. In this situation, you might also look at one or more of the following:

- Information about the author and/or publication details
- Contents page
- Foreword and/or Introduction
- Index

- **Predicting**

Predicting means using what you already know about the topic, what you want to learn about the topic from the text, and what you have learnt from your previewing in order to **guess what kind of information the text will contain and how useful it will be**. You will often be surprised how much you already know about a text before you even begin reading. Brainstorming your 'prior' knowledge will help you to understand the text.

- **Scanning**

Scanning involves **finding words** (or other symbols, such as figures) which have particular importance for you. When you are scanning, you already know the form of the words or symbols you are looking for. When you scan, you normally focus on small parts of the text only.

- **Search reading**

Search reading means quickly **finding ideas** which are particularly important for you. This is different from scanning, because you don't know the exact words you are looking for in advance and cannot make a direct match.

- **Identifying the main ideas**

This involves **understanding the writer's main points**. It may be possible to do this quite quickly after skimming the text. However, with more difficult texts it may only be possible to identify the main ideas after more detailed reading.

- **Careful reading**

This involves **reading slowly and carefully** so that you understand every word in the text (or the part of the text that you are most interested in). You might do this in order to understand the details of the text and also to infer meaning that has not been directly stated (see below).

- **Inferring**

Inferring means **obtaining meaning from the text that the writer has not explicitly stated**. Sometimes the writer expects you to fill gaps in the text in order for it to make sense. Sometimes you may wish to infer why the author wrote the text, i.e., the writer's purpose, and also the writer's attitude to what s/he is writing about.

- **Dealing with unfamiliar words**

When you find a word you don't understand in a text, you need to **decide first whether it is really necessary to understand the word**. Perhaps you can understand enough of the text without understanding the word, in which case you can ignore it. Alternatively, the context in which the word is located may allow you to guess the meaning of the word well enough to continue reading. If neither of these applies, you may have to look up the word in a dictionary. If you find you are using a dictionary so much that you are prevented from reading the text at a reasonable speed, the text may be too specialized for you, and you should consider finding another one which deals with the same topic in a more generalized way.

An approach to dealing with new vocabulary is to decide whether you:

- *need to know the word now to help you understand the text and use it later under different circumstances*. In this case, you will need some way of recording the word, e.g., in a vocabulary notebook. You will also have to decide whether to rely on working out the meaning of the word from context, or whether you need to check in a dictionary;
- *only need to know the word now to help you understand the text*. This is often the case with technical words or low-frequency words. These are words which are not often used in English, even by native speakers of the language, except for specialist reasons. Of course, if you are reading a text in your academic area, you will need to know certain specialist vocabulary. You will need to record this vocabulary as well as use it so it becomes part of your active vocabulary, i.e., words that you use to communicate effectively;

- *don't need to know this word either now or in the future.* If the word does not prevent you from understanding the rest of the text, you probably do not need to worry about it. If the word occurs several times, however, you may feel it is necessary to work out its meaning or look it up and record it.

3. Detailed comprehension of sentences and paragraphs

In an academic context, much of your reading work will involve dealing with complete texts and extracting information from them in various ways, i.e., reading purposefully in order to make use of content. However, in order to fulfil your reading purpose, you may sometimes find it necessary to have a very precise understanding of specific sentences and paragraphs. There may be obstacles to your understanding in terms of grammar or ideas, or the text's organization or a combination of these. This is one area the course will help to solve.

Detailed comprehension involves analyzing the relationship between ideas within a specific sentence or between a sequence of sentences of up to paragraph length – or even beyond. This precise knowledge might be required, for example, to infer meaning, to view the content critically, to enhance overall understanding or to formulate precise understanding.

4. Text analysis

It is often helpful to understand the way a text is organized in order to make the best use of it. The organization of a text can be considered at the global level; for example, the way that the text is organized into sections and paragraphs according to the purpose of the text and the type of text. In a report of an experiment, for example, it is very common to see the following pattern of organization:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Title | • Results |
| • Abstract | • Conclusions |
| • Introduction/background | • References/bibliography |
| • Method | |

Another aspect of organization that can be useful to examine is how information is organized logically at the local level, i.e., within complex sentences or paragraphs.

As you can see, there are many different aspects of academic reading that we will be considering during the course. Whilst it is important to be aware of all these different aspects, it is also important to:

- **develop a flexible reading style.** Becoming a better academic reader is not just about mastering different aspects of reading. It is also important to decide which is the best way to read a text depending on the particular academic purpose that you have for reading it;
- **remember that the more you read, the better you will read.** Regular independent reading outside the classroom is essential for any student wishing to develop reading abilities such as fluency, greater reading speed, vocabulary acquisition and the strategies associated with successful reading.

You can improve your academic reading level by making decisions about:

- **why** you are reading;
- **what** you are reading;
- **how** you are reading;
- **how well** you are reading.

3a

The environment today

This unit will help you:

- read quickly for global comprehension of the main ideas in a text;
- make use of your prior knowledge to help your global comprehension;
- identify key words to enhance quick global comprehension;
- think about what strategies to use for a specific reading purpose.

In this unit you will read two texts. The first is from an article in *Geographical Review* about acid rain, and the second is from the *Biological Science Review* about the decline of one particular bird species.

Text 3a-1 Acid rain in Norway (Source Book pp. 16–18)

Task 1: Raising text awareness

Often it is useful to be able to summarize a text quickly and efficiently without carefully reading all or nearly all of the words in the text. When you want to do a global summary of a text, you need to focus immediately on the topic. The title should help. After reading the title, you may find that you automatically draw on your prior knowledge to bring what you know about the topic to mind.

1.1 What is a global summary? Write a short definition.

1.2 Look at Text 3a-1 in the Source Book. What is the title? You have one minute to write down anything you know about acid rain.

1.3 You may also want to ask yourself questions about the title, e.g., *Is acid rain only important in Norway?* What other questions could you ask yourself about the title? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

Task 2: Taking information from displayed information

Text 3a-1 contains quite a lot of *overt* or *displayed* information, e.g., apart from the title, there are also three figures, a table and two section subheadings. Figure 1, for example, tells you that the use of lime to reduce acidification damage in Norway seems to have increased significantly between 1983 and 1995 (particularly after 1993). Therefore, certain key words may be useful here and in the other sources of *overt* information provided with this text. Terms such as *lime* and *acidification damage* are obviously important, and are phrases on which you might focus in order to gain a quick global understanding of the text.

2.1 Look through Text 3a-1. What new information (or words) do you learn from Figures 2 and 3, Table 1 and the two section subheadings? For example, what trends do the figures suggest?

| Information source | New information or words |
|----------------------|---|
| Figure 1 | Very sharp rise in amount of lime used to reduce acidification damage, especially since 1993. |
| Figure 2 | |
| Figure 3 | |
| Table 1 | |
| Section subheading A | |
| Section subheading B | |

Study tip

Remember to make use of display information for raising text awareness before reading.



2.2 You have learnt about how to quickly access information to help you form a global summary. Discuss what you have learnt in small groups and complete the following list of points.

Ways of quickly accessing information about a text include:

- looking at the title
-
-
-
-
-
-

Task 3: Writing a global summary

When writing a global summary, concentrate on the main points. Write as accurately as you can, but your main aim is to communicate clearly what you understand to be the key points of a text.

3.1 Read Text 3a-1. (Your teacher will set you a time limit for this.)

3.2 Write a single-paragraph summary of Text 3a-1. (Your teacher will also set a time limit for this task.)

3.3 Compare your summary with the model supplied by your teacher.

3.4 Think about the strategies you used to carry out the task. Bearing in mind your teacher's summary, do you think your strategies were successful?

- a) Do you agree with your teacher's summary?
- b) What strategies did you use to carry out the task?
- c) Were the strategies successful?

3.5 How do you rate your summary?

- a) Tick the score that you think best describes it: 100% ☐ 75% ☐ 50% ☐ 25% ☐
- b) If you had any problems doing the task, what were they? Choose from the list below.

- Difficulty with the topic
- Difficulty with the vocabulary and/or the language
- The way the text was organized
- Difficulty with the content of the text (e.g., ideas, hypothesis, concepts, etc.)
- The length of the text
- Other reasons (not listed above)

Text 3a-2 Skylarks in decline (Source Book pp. 19–21)

You now have a second text to summarize. This will give you an opportunity to put into practice what you have learnt from this summary.

Task 4: More global summary practice

4.1 Read Text 3a-2, in the time limit your teacher gives you. You will not have time to read the whole text.

4.2 Write a one-paragraph summary, using your own words.



4.3 Compare your summary with the model supplied by your teacher.

4.4 Discuss the following questions.

- a) In what ways was Text 3a-2 similar to or different from Text 3a-1?
- b) What strategies did you employ to complete this task?
- c) Were you more successful or less successful in completing the second summary?

Unit summary

In this unit you have practised reading quickly for global comprehension of the main ideas in a text in order to write a summary. You have also thought more about how you can use prior knowledge to help your global comprehension and how identifying key words can enhance this.

1 Complete this summary about accessing information in a text by using one word only in each space.

If you want to access information in a text quickly and efficiently, you need to be able to quickly identify the _____ of the text – what the text is about. You won't need to understand the meaning of every _____ or phrase to do this. To start with, looking at the _____ of the text will help you to draw on your _____ knowledge and to start thinking about what the text might tell you. You might like to ask some _____ that you want the text to answer. Looking at displayed _____, like figures, tables and subheadings will help you to make further predictions and build up a picture of the text before you read. As you read, you need to be able to identify _____ points that will help you summarize the main idea or argument in the text.

2 In this unit, you had to identify the difficulties you had when writing a successful summary. Without looking back, complete this statement.

My biggest difficulty writing a successful summary was _____
_____.

3 Give one piece of advice to a classmate who wants to write a successful summary of a text.

For web resources relevant to this unit, see:

www.englishforacademicstudy.com/student/reading/links

This weblink will provide you with help on paraphrasing and summarizing.