TEACHING METHODS FOR ADVANCED READING

A. Leitty Quiñones *

The present material has been prepared in order to contribute to the Basic English course for other careers. Since there has been a great change of the material taught in this course, i.e. from teaching grammar to teaching comprehension of the written word, this article is intended to give the new teacher some suggested teaching procedures for conducting the reading lesson.

The material gathered together here represents a compilation of goal definitions, exercise techniques, and suggested teaching procedures drawn from a wide variety of sources. There are many more aspects in the teaching of reading than are mentioned here and there is more the teacher can add to it, especially to exercise techniques and suggested classroom procedures for conducting the reading lesson.

The Neglect of Reading.

Unfortunately, in many English-as-a-second-or-foreign-language programmes the written language has been de-emphasized to the point of extinction. Some students seem never to be taught how to read English at all.

A careful consideration of the needs of English students usually reveals that an ability to read English is going to be very important. For many students, in fact, including students of English as a foreign language, reading skills will eventually be much more important than other language skills.

Goals in Teaching Advanced Reading.

In any event, since our students are literate, it is not the process of reading as such that they must learn, but rather skills for reading a foreign language, English.

We need not concern ourselves primarily with teaching appreciation or evaluation of literature. In this case, literary work is not relevant. Even among native speakers, after all, most purposeful reading is for information rather than enjoyment. It is clearly of great importance that pupils should be trained to read for information and that such reading should be geared to work that is expected of them now or later in scientific and technical subjects. Students of technical English should read passages which provide information. These passages would not only provide knowledge, but also satisfy the students' curiosity about the world they live in —and perhaps most important of all— it would provide a foundation for scientific and technical studies later on.

Passages on scientific materials are written at a certain level of language; the passive voice is used in them quite often. Students who go on eventually to scientific and technical subjects must get used to the passive in their reading since it is so widely used in the kind of books and journals that they will have to use. It should be noted that reading material of this kind (scientific) does not easily lend itself to being read aloud.

The student who reads so slowly and laboriously that he can focus on just one word at a time —reading word by word— is not really reading at all. He will usually be unable to put the words together to understand the sense of the sentence, and he will certainly be unable to unite sentences into a full understanding of paragraph meaning.

Profesora de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas, Facultad de Letras
In reading a foreign language a reader faces three major kinds of problems: vocabulary problems, content problems, and structural problems. The first type of problem has received a good deal of attention, but too many teachers still re-emphasize vocabulary beyond the point where such re-emphasis makes sense.

Our main goal, then, is to teach the student how to get information from the printed page efficiently, rapidly, and with full understanding. Students must learn to face passages in which there are some unfamiliar words, and they must be trained in ways of discovering their meanings. The ability to do this is most necessary since in reading “full” English (unlimited), the use of the dictionary for every unfamiliar word will make reading intolerably slow. A more complete understanding of our task can be gained by listing the specific reading skills our students must develop or improve in order to achieve this goal.

Five Areas of Skill.

1. Speed for recognition and comprehension.
   a) word-recognition speed: visual discrimination
   b) word-comprehension speed: symbol-sound-meaning associations
   c) sentence-structure recognition: reading by structures

2. Vocabulary recognition and comprehension.
   a) word formation: derivation and compounding
   b) lexical range: choices and restrictions
   c) vocabulary in context: using context clues to meanings.

3. Sentence structure and sentence comprehension.
   a) understanding advanced-level conjunction, nominalization, embedding, etc., and grasping the main idea.
   b) sentence comprehension: understanding the full meaning.

4. Paragraph structure and paragraph comprehension.
   a) paragraph organization: the “central idea” (paragraph development).
   b) scanning for specific information.
   c) full understanding: paragraph analysis.

5. Comprehension of the complete selection.
   a) surveying for the main ideas.
   b) scanning for specific information.
   c) reading for full understanding.

1. INTRODUCTION OF THE READING.

1.1 You may assign the selection to be read and understood at home before introducing it in class and have the students select verbs and nouns and find the meaning of new words.

1.2 At the beginning of the class period, while calling the roll, you may ask the students to read the text silently and circle, underline or list in their notebooks the words they do not understand. Or, perhaps you may ask them to read silently the first paragraph and to circle the verb in each sentence.

1.3 Read the title of the selection and have the students tell you anything they already know about the topic, i.e. have the students tell you anything they know about “Hawaii”, “Cigarette Smoking and Cancer of the Lung”, etc. (see N.B. for No. 1.4).
1.4 Write a few questions on the board before actually starting to read the selection and have the students answer them. You may choose students of those careers which are directly related to the content of the reading, i.e. for “Psychiatry” choose a psychology student to answer the questions, for “Cancer of the Lung” choose a medical student, and so on.

N.B. If the student is not able to express himself in English, allow him to use Spanish. These questions written on the board are much more likely to stimulate attention to the salient points of an article than if they are relegated to the easily-ignored final position.

1.5 Introduce briefly the ideas contained in the reading using as many easy words as possible so that the students have no trouble understanding them. For this purpose the reading selection can be divided into paragraphs and synonyms can be widely used.

II. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Preparing for vocabulary, syntax, and or other difficulties.

Stage 1: Pre-reading preparation.

2.1 List new or difficult vocabulary items or idioms, with or without definitions, and give sentences from the reading plus additional sentences that show the meaning in context.

2.2 Present new or difficult grammatical structures. Give examples from the selection supplemented by other examples if necessary, illustrating the meaning of the construction.

2.3 Explain items which may be difficult because the cultural or technical meaning is unfamiliar.

2.4 List the subordinators, sentence connectors, conjunctions, and prepositions and explain their basic function. These words frequently distract the student’s attention and do not let him understand a statement, phrase, or even a paragraph.

N.B. Motivating the reading.

a) Give purpose to the reading. Tell the students that they are to read, for example, in order to summarize the main ideas, or find specific information, or do a vocabulary exercise.

b) Outline or paraphrase the selection for the students.

c) Relate the selection to the students’ own experience, interests, or needs by means of questioning and discussion.

Stage 2: Reading the Selection.

Suggested Procedures.

2.5 The teacher may read aloud each sentence or phrase, each paragraph, or the whole reading. After the entire selection has been read aloud, the class reads it silently for comprehension. The silent reading may be timed. Each paragraph may be followed by comprehension questions. (For other procedures at this stage see 1. INTRODUCTION).

2.6 The teacher may read aloud the first sentences and analyse them on the board by pointing out VERB, SUBJECT, OBJECT, and by underlining the most important word or words in the subject and in the object. The main idea and
the rest of the words (i.e. adjectives, adverbs, etc.) should be given after the preceding analysis. The teacher may continue this analysis orally. If time does not allow to finish the whole reading, the rest of the selection can be assigned to be done at home in the same way.

2.7 Paired responses using semantic equivalents can be a very effective way of explaining the meaning of some words or expressions. Expressions equivalent in meaning to those found in the reading can be widely used for this purpose, e.g.

They are trying to fire the President.

They are trying to get rid of the President.

2.8 Synonym. We may also write on the board those words which we think will present difficulty and explain their meaning. The same ideas are expressed by two or more different words or phrases, one of which may be familiar to the reader, e.g.

When it comes to manufactured goods there is actually more diversity in this country than Europe has ever known. The variety of goods carried by our stores is the first thing that impresses any visitor from abroad.

Stage 3: Follow-up activities.

2.9 In the classroom. The teacher selects, according to the aims of the lesson, exercises of the types described in IV. EVALUATION. He may conduct the session orally or in writing, or may use a combination of oral and written procedure: the teacher asks questions orally—the class responds in writing—individuals are called on to read answers orally. It is through this process of asking questions pertinent to the main ideas—not through questioning every detail in sight or through translating from one end to the other—that the teacher can give the student needed training in reading and develop his ability to detect the main ideas.

The teacher may also set aside time for the students to ask him questions. In this way, he can cover some problems not brought out in the discussion, but which students may want to have clarified.

2.10 As homework. The teacher may assign written exercises developed out of the day’s classroom work. For example: write out full answers to comprehension questions done orally in class. Or write a paraphrase, summary, or outline of the reading selection.

Homework assignments also carry the student into the preparation stage of the next lesson. He may be instructed to study new vocabulary in context, or to survey the selection for main ideas, or to scan it for specific information. At the earlier levels of instruction, however, reading for full understanding will be done only in the classroom under the teacher’s supervision. At the most advanced levels, on the other hand, much of the reading might be done outside the class, with the class period devoted to follow-up exercises and preparation for the next selection.

2.11 Out-of-class reading. A very important necessary activity through much of the English course is quite simply a great deal of practice in reading a wide variety of material both in and out of class.

Out-of-class extensive reading for expansion of reading skills, in contrast to intensive in-class drill in these same skills, should make use of relatively easier reading materials. Completely new vocabulary and grammatical patterns
should be minimized if not avoided altogether—since the purpose is to provide a wide range of use and meaning contexts for known vocabulary and patterns. The student thus develops his skills in deducing meanings of new words and in extending the lexical range of known items.

III. VOCABULARY

N.B. Vocabulary should be presented for recognition and not for production, and it should be explained according to its context.

3.1 Cognates. The teacher should have the student recognize them. These words usually constitute the lowest difficulty group—these are easy since even students who have never studied English at all will recognize them. These words are of value at a very elementary level. Similar words in English and Spanish can be classified into a small number of sub-patterns, for example English -TION is similar to Spanish -CIÓN, etc.

3.2 Deceptive Cognates, e.g. asistir — assist. Spanish asistir is similar in form to English assist but the meaning is practically always different. Spanish asistir is similar in meaning to English attend, while English assist means help, support. These words that are similar in form but different in meaning constitute a special group very high on the scale of difficulty. These are difficult words.

3.3 Expansion through families of words. The student can be asked to build several derived words from a basic one by analogy, e.g. REASON, REASONABLE, UNREASONABLE, REASONABLY, UNREASONABLY, REASONABLENESS. HOPE, HOPEFUL, HOPEFULLY, HOPEFULNESS, HOPELESS, HOPELESSLY. N.B. This puts into practice the formation of adjectives, nouns, and adverbs with the use of prefixes and suffixes.

IV. EVALUATION

Exercises and tests are the truest reflections of the teacher’s pedagogical aims: he should beware of his exercises and tests, for they tell the truth about his objectives as a teacher.

4.1 Sentence comprehension: getting the full meaning.

Logical completion. Complete the sentence in a logical way, using one of the four words:

You can trust Henry to take good care of your money, for he is very (honest, angry, evil, distant).

4.2 Comprehension questions: paragraph structure and comprehension.

Questioning for comprehension deserves further description, because it is a technique of wide usefulness for teaching other language skills besides reading, and because it is used extensively in almost all reading texts.

a) Paragraph organization: reading for the central idea. What single word expresses the central idea of paragraph two? Read the paragraph quickly to determine the central idea. Then turn the page and choose one statement that best expresses the central idea.

b) Paragraph development: create a coherent paragraph by placing the sentences below in logical order. (Five sentences from the reading are given).

c) Scanning for specific information: scan the following paragraph to
answer this question: (a question is given) The teacher can write more questions on the board and have the students answer them orally or in writing.

N.B. It is not essential to ask as many as 6 questions on a short passage. Overquestioning should be avoided. Good questioning is the result of careful thought about the reading before it is given.

If there is time for group activity, divide the class into groups and have the students write questions themselves about the selection. Assign one paragraph to each group. One can choose those students who prove to be more efficient in English and have them guide the groups—send one of these students to each group; they can explain to the others anything that they do not understand.

N.B. 1: Go around checking each group and making sure the questions are being formulated correctly. Have the students write them on the board to be corrected. Interchange the questions between the groups so that they can be answered by another group.

N.B. 2: If time does not allow for group activity, assign the production of questions as homework.

N.B. 3: This type of exercise puts Section C of Lesson 9 (English Sentence Structure by Krohn) into practice, i.e. the production of questions. The different types of questions that can be produced by the students are listed below.

**d.1. YES/NO QUESTIONS:** with auxiliaries BE, DO, DOES, DID, or TRUE/FALSE.

**d.2 ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS:** e.g. Is a psychosis a dangerous or a normal illness? Do people in Hawaii mix with one nationality or with many nationalities?, etc.

**d.3 WH-QUESTIONS:** with WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW MUCH, HOW MANY, HOW.

**d.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE:** e.g. Where is Hawaii? a) in the Pacific b) in the Atlantic c) in the Mediterranean

**d.5** include personal questions which are related to the topic, e.g. Would you like to go to Hawaii? Is there lack of petroleum today?, etc. The answer requires evaluation or judgement relating the reading selection to additional information or experience of the reader. The teacher may write this on the board to help the students formulate different types of questions.

4.3 Comprehension of Complete Selection.

a) Surveying for main ideas.

*Outlining.* The main ideas are given below in mix-up order. Arrange them in the order in which the author discusses them (three main ideas are given).

b) Summary of the reading (oral or written).
4.4 Improving Vocabulary

a) Word Formation

a.1) Negative Prefixes.

(i) Use the correct prefix (DIS-, IM-, MIS-, UN-) to make negative forms of the following words from the selection:

appear_____________
just _______________
personal__________

(ii) Fill the blank with the proper negative prefix:

He always____connects the wires.
He always____pronounces the words.
His work is completely____satisfactory.

a.2) Derived Words.

(i) Fill the blank with a noun (plural form) related to the underlined noun in the sentence:

Our interest was in art and (artists).
Our interest was in crime and_______
Our interest was in music and_______

(ii) Complete the following table or write some words on the blackboard and have the students give you derived words (see III, 3.3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
<th>VERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>original</td>
<td>originality</td>
<td>originally</td>
<td>originate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Lexical Range.

Which sentence illustrates the same use of the word (or idiomatic or figurative expression) as in the reading selection?

There are bound to be regional differences.

1) The book is bound in leather.
2) Children are bound to have some accidents as they grow up.
3) The prisoner’s hands were bound.

c) Vocabulary in Context.

c.1) Using context clues.
A dynamic teacher can keep teaching from becoming boring.
The best synonym for dynamic is:

1) powerless
2) athletic
3) forceful
4) cheerful

c.2) Using words in sentences (orally or in writing).

Use in one sentence each pair or group of words from the reading listed together, e.g. Anthropologist, cultures.

5th August, 1974
BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTAS

1. Words which are similar in form and in meaning, eg. hospital, hotel, calendar, etc.

2. Words that are similar in form but represent meanings that are different, eg. assist asistir, etc.