



## Why do we read?

People read for many different reasons. They read to learn about news and events, to communicate with one another, to get from one place to another, to acquire new knowledge about an array of topics, to figure out what to eat, to learn the process for making or doing something, and to entertain themselves, among many other purposes. But what is reading, exactly? Is it more than drawing meaning from letters and words, and deciding how to interpret a text?

## What is reading?

Reading is a combination of conscious and unconscious thinking processes (Mikulecky, 2008). When people read texts fluently in their native language, they use these processes to extract meaning from the text.



Reading comprehension involves a combination of abilities to:

- recognise words rapidly and efficiently
- develop and use a very large recognition vocabulary
- process sentences in order to build comprehension
- engage a range of strategic processes and underlying cognitive skills (i.e. setting goals, changing goals flexibly, monitoring comprehension)
- interpret meaning in relation to background knowledge
- interpret and evaluate texts in line with reader goals and purposes
- process texts fluently over an extended period of time (Grabe, 2014)

# Reading and Motivation

When learners have not built up a sufficient knowledge of words, phrases, and grammatical forms, their reading processing speed is reduced significantly. Without the automaticity that is required to read and comprehend a text quickly, readers may end up spending more time trying to decode the meaning of a text than enjoying it or being informed by it. However, when they are exposed to a wide range of texts at an appropriate level for them to process meaning efficiently, they can steadily build up their reading fluency in the foreign language, which may result in an increase in motivation to read.

## How do graded readers work?

Graded readers are texts that are created using specific pedagogical guidelines to help ensure that learners at a certain level of reading proficiency are able to comprehend the text. Graded readers are normally “graded” by limiting the number of head words at each level, as well as gradually expanding grammatical complexity and sentence length as learners move from starter-level readers to advanced-level readers. Starter-level readers may also use more photos and illustrations and simple plots to facilitate comprehension. As learners progress to higher levels, they may encounter fewer images and more complex stories (Waring 2011). By reading a wide array of texts that are graded at a similar level, learners can develop their reading comprehension, increase their vocabulary knowledge, and become more fluent readers in the foreign language.

## Ways to use readers

Graded readers can be used in a variety of teaching contexts, and for different purposes. Teachers may wish to use them to expand learners’ knowledge on different topics, to provide an engaging contrast to the usual course book, as a shared class activity and/or to set them as homework activities. Topics can be explored in more depth and used as a springboard to further discussion, language skills practice, or project work.

Graded readers are a flexible resource that complement and enhance *any* English course, at *any* level and at *any* length – general English, Business English, EAP, Exam preparation.

Used for self-study, learners can choose the titles that interest them the most, at the appropriate level, and use graded readers to improve their English while reading for enjoyment. Increasing competency in second language reading has been shown to have a direct effect on learners’ motivation for reading (González 2013, Takase 2007).



# What is *intensive* and *extensive* reading?

Both *intensive reading* and *extensive reading* enhance the learner's experience in acquiring a new language. These two approaches to reading serve different purposes, and can be used together in a complementary way to aid in language development.

## Intensive Reading

In *intensive reading*, learners focus on a text that may be more challenging, and use pre-reading and post-reading tasks, in addition to a dictionary to look up unknown words, to ensure comprehension. In this approach to reading, learners should understand between 90 and 98 percent of the words on the page when they begin, which allows for adequate comprehension, with the assumption that they can look up unknown words as they read, to better comprehend the text.

## Extensive Reading

In *extensive reading*, learners are reading for enjoyment, without having to stop and focus on a large number of unknown vocabulary. Learners should choose texts where they already understand 98 percent of the words on the page in order for them to read extensively (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2011). In extensive reading, the idea is that learners choose stories that interest them, which are the correct level for them, and that they read a large number of stories to increase their overall reading fluency.

Both types of reading offer learners opportunities to improve their second language knowledge and abilities, but they possess some key differences. The table below outlines some of the benefits of each approach.

## Benefits of *Intensive* and *Extensive* Reading

Extensive Reading	Intensive Reading
Wide range and variety of texts to choose from	Explicit instruction of vocabulary and grammar
Implicit learning of vocabulary in context	Practice of specific reading strategies
Increased motivation to pursue reading outside of class	Comprehension of text structure, cohesion, and genre features
Development of overall reading fluency	Development of skills for exams

## Key principles of *extensive reading*

One of the main goals of *extensive reading* is that learners enjoy what they read, and read enough, at the right level, so that they can develop their overall reading fluency.

As Waring puts it, learners need to READ:

**R**ead quickly and ...

**E**njoyably with ...

**A**dequate comprehension so they ...

**D**on't need a dictionary.

(Waring 2011, p.3)

Here are **10 principles of extensive reading** as identified by Day and Bamford:

1. The reading material is at the level relevant to the learners' language abilities
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available
3. Learners choose what they want to read
4. Learners read as much as possible
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding
6. Reading is its own reward
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower
8. Reading is individual and silent
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader  
(Day & Bamford, 2002, pp. 137-141)

## Key principles of *intensive reading*

In *intensive reading*, learners practice "specific lexical and reading comprehension skills and strategies in a more clearly focused and intentional manner" (Loucky 2005). Learners may be asked to scan a text for specific information, to answer questions using newly introduced vocabulary, or to make inferences about the content. These types of skills may help learners prepare for exams, where intensive reading strategies are often required.

Here are **3 best practices of intensive reading**:

1. **Pre-teaching of key concepts or vocabulary terms** before the learner begins to read the main text
2. **While-reading questions** to enable learners check comprehension and provide additional opportunities to use new vocabulary
3. **Post-reading activities** to allow learners recall new vocabulary and prompt practice of additional second language skills, such as responding to discussion questions, writing about what they have read, and practicing grammatical forms that appeared in the context of the reading

## Pearson English Readers

The **Pearson English Readers** series offers more than 250 titles for learners to choose from, including famous stories from popular authors, film tie-ins and classic literature, to ensure students find books that inspire and motivate them. The series spans a range of seven proficiency levels (from Easystart-Level 6), so that learners can find titles at the appropriate level. Audio materials for each book provide models for correct pronunciation and intonation of each story, and offers opportunities for learners to listen to stories as they follow along on the page.

## Pearson English Active Readers

The **Pearson English Active Readers** series features over 70 titles that have been carefully graded across five levels of proficiency (Easystart-Level 4) to ensure that learners are able to develop their skills systematically as they progress in their study of English. The readers contain a wide range of pre-, while-, and post-reading activities for skills development, and photocopiable worksheets and additional CD-ROM activities help extend this practice. Similarly to the Pearson English Readers, audio materials for each book provide models for correct pronunciation and intonation of each story.



## *Extensive or Intensive reading* programme – what is best for your class?

In actuality, it's not an either/or situation – intensive and *extensive reading* complement one another, and both can be used in language programs in ways that benefit the needs of learners. As Harmer puts it, “to get maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading” (Harmer 2007, p.283).

For example, an EFL program may have all students in a class read one reader together intensively, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and reading strategies. Students may also be asked to choose several stories to read extensively—for enjoyment, and development of individual reading fluency. This may be done outside of class, or in class, if time allows, using Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), where student self-select books and read in class for a set period of time (Lipp 1990).

Choosing the correct level for each type of reading is key. The Extensive Reading Foundation (2011), recommends that intensive reading be done at a learner's instructional level, that is, when the learner can understand 90–98% of the text, filling in the gaps with reading strategies and dictionary support. For extensive reading to be successful, learners should already understand 98% of the text, to allow them to read enjoyably, without stopping to look up new vocabulary.

Graded readers such as **Pearson English Readers** and **Pearson English Active Readers** are written to specific proficiency levels, and are mapped against scales such as CEFR, Global Scale of English (GSE), and popular standardized exams. This mapping can help instructors choose titles that are suitable for in-class intensive reading work, based on the overall language level of their classes. For extensive reading, however, students should be encouraged to pick up books that interest them, and try reading a page.

The Extensive Reading Foundation recommends that instructors have students follow these guidelines to ensure proper selection of stories for extensive reading:

- read some of the book itself, not only look at the title, cover and illustrations
- choose something interesting to read. If the book becomes boring or too difficult, they should put it down and read something else
- find something they can read at about 150–200 words per minute
- choose something they can read without a dictionary
- be able to understand almost everything in the book

(Extensive Reading Foundation 2011)

# Where can I access additional research and support for using Readers?

## Research on Intensive and Extensive Reading

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## Setting Up and Implementing an Extensive Reading Program

- Extensive Reading Foundation: <http://erfoundation.org>
- Extensive Reading Central: <http://www.er-central.com>

## Graded Readers at Pearson Education

- [www.pearsonenglishreaders.com](http://www.pearsonenglishreaders.com)

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