

The Basics of Teaching Reading Skills

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Have you ever been frustrated by your students' poor reading skills? You have probably said to them that they do not need to read word by word; we often say to students 'read it quickly', 'you only need to get the general idea of what the text is about', 'you don't need to understand every single word', 'don't try to translate what you are reading' ...and at the end of all this advice from us, they still read just as slowly. So, what do we do? Taking a nap while the students are reading might lower our stress levels but of course it doesn't help the students. There are a number of skills that we can teach students to help them improve their ability to understand and process text.

Basically there are three types of reading skills, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

- Pre-reading activities prepare the students for reading the text. They help the students gain an idea of what the text will be about and this increases their motivation to read.

- While-reading activities improve their ability to interact and understand the text.

- Post-reading activities which help students to critically analyse what they have read. Post-reading activities also increase the students' understanding of the text.

Some of the skills, which we should teach students, are:

- * Previewing
- * Predicting
- * Skimming
- * Scanning

Previewing and predicting are pre-reading skills and will be covered in this article. The other two,

which are during-reading skills, will be in the next edition of ETJ.

PREVIEWING

A preview is a quick and easy way to find out what a text will be about before reading it. This skill helps students decide if they need to read a particular text or not, it also helps them to decide what the text will be about before reading it. If the information they want does not look like it will be in the text, then they shouldn't bother reading

3) Look at a picture from the text and guess what will be in the text.

PREDICTING

Predicting involves using cues in the text to guess what is going to come next. Understanding the context of what they have already read helps students to make predictions. They can also use the illustrations, vocabulary or the grammatical structure to guess what is coming next.

Example activities to build predicting skills:

1) Stop reading part way through a story and ask the students to guess what will happen next.

2) Cloze exercises have some words missing from the text.

Students have to use their understanding of the content of the text to guess the missing words and ideas, for example:

Japan has many theme parks. The closest one to my home is Tivoli Park in _____. The newest park is _____ in Osaka, which opened in March _____ year.

Tokyo _____ is the most popular theme park and it attracts many _____ each year.

When you prepare a cloze exercise, make sure that the words you delete are ones that the students know. In the example above, students living in the Chugoku region would know that Tivoli Park is in Kurashiki, but students who live in

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it. Thus previewing can save the students a lot of time. Previewing is also very simple and takes little time. All it involves is using the title, the illustrations, the table of contents, or chapter and section headings and so on to get an idea of the overall direction of the text.

Example activities to build previewing skills:

1) Look at the cover of a book and guess what the story will be about.

2) Examine the title or the front page of an article and guess what it will be about. When you first do these exercises with a class, it is a good idea to give the students a list of suggestions to make it easier to predict successfully. They then choose the one that they think is the most appropriate.

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other areas of Japan are unlikely to know it.

Students also need to be aware that in many instances there will be more than one choice, which can correctly fill the gap. The answer they choose may be different from the teachers' but that does not mean it is wrong – if it is an appropriate answer, then it is correct.

3) After doing the previewing activities of examining the front cover, title and illustrations and guessing what the text will be about, the students could predict vocabulary that they think may be in the text.

4) After students have predicted the general theme of the text, they could write some specific ques-

tions that they think might be answered in the text. Later, when they read the text in detail, they can find the answers to their questions.

These previewing and predicting suggestions can easily be combined to make a lesson plan. It is best if the students work in pairs or small groups.

i) Give the title and a list of ideas of what the text may be about. The students discuss which is the best suggestion for what the text could be about.

ii) Show them a picture from the text. Ask the students to decide if they are still happy with their choice from i). They may change their answer if they want.

iii) Let them read the introductory paragraph from the text. Allow them a short time to confirm that

they are still happy with their answer – they may still change their choice if they wish.

iv) Ask the students to write some questions that they would like to find the answers too, when they read the whole text.

v) Read the whole text in detail. Firstly, check if they were correct in deciding what the text would be about. And secondly, find the answers to their questions.

Once you have taught the students about previewing and predicting, it is important to give them as many chances as possible to practice these skills. If they do not have regular practice they will forget the skills.

This article will be continued in the next edition of *The ETJ Journal*.