

## READING-RELATED STUDY SKILLS: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

In reading, there are two problems. One is language problem and the other is reading problem. The author feels that in our classroom teaching-learning process, only the language problem has normally been taken care of and the reading problem is largely ignored. In this paper, the author has suggested some of the techniques like sustained silent reading, questioning techniques, skimming, and scanning, etc., through which reading-related study skills can be developed. The author is of the view that reading-related study skills are as useful for a teacher as they are for the student. The need for incorporating these elements in the English curriculum has become all the more relevant in these days of information explosion.

**Keywords:** reading, skills, techniques, strategies, habits, teachers, students, curriculum

Intelligence does not seem to be the only criterion for achievement. To a great extent, academic achievement depends on effective study habits, strategies or techniques of study, as most of the second language learning problems are not related to language but to the psychology of learning.

"Reading", in the words of Francis Bacon, "maketh a full man ... Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested". This quotation clearly reflects the value of applying varying reading-related study skills to different reading materials. Some books may just be skimmed, others scanned carefully and still others are to be thoroughly read with critical acumen.

In reading, there are two problems. One is the language problem, the other is the reading problem. Our concern here is the reading problem, i.e. how to make one an efficient reader once the language problem has presumably been settled. In our classroom, only the language problem has normally been taken care of and the reading problem is largely ignored, probably under the assumption that it would evolve by itself in due course.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a technique that can be tried in our schools and colleges irrespective of levels to improve reading speed. In SSR about five to fifteen minutes of the usual language class is devoted to free reading. Children read what they like to read. The objectives of SSR are: (1) the students would increase the amount of self-selected material they read recreationally, and (2) students would express improved attitude towards recreational reading. It has often been seen that the students like to see teachers also enjoy reading in the class.

The SSR programme is seen to be more productive or at least much more popular with the higher ability groups. As students are required to keep a record of books read, they get opportunities to discuss what they read with the teacher during short conferences. This programme in general may be only as effective as the traditional teaching/learning programme, but when carried out on long term,

say more than six months, it is consistently more effective. Many studies consistently show that reading achievement is related to the amount of reading.

Light reading (e.g., comics books) ability and can also lead to more serious reading. Studies report that students' taste for reading gradually progresses towards a point at which they voluntarily select better books. The availability of a plentiful supply of books is a pre-requisite to reading growth. Second language learners will acquire English more effectively and painlessly if greater emphasis is given to the role of reading in the school programme. Appealing stories should form the basis for classroom teaching and discussion rather than the highly structured reading programmes followed at present, which subordinate interest and meaning to a carefully controlled sequence of structures.

In this context a 'book report programme', though it had been a very common technique, is worth trying. It should be made part of the language course. A list of titles of easy and interesting professional books and a list of novels, short stories, more or less graded in terms of difficulty adhering to the vocabulary control (though this vocabulary control is vehemently criticized now-a-days) can be drawn up for the students to select from. Keeping a small library in the corner of the classroom will naturally attract the attention of the students, at least to look at them at first and then to become gradually interested in reading.

Writing book reports facilitates two incidental benefits. Firstly, the requirement to present the author, title, publisher etc. in the correct form of entry strengthens bibliography writing skills. And secondly, the students learn how to summarize, simplify, retain and comment on a long piece of writing. We cannot expect the reading habit to be acquired on its own; some gentle compulsion, a few tips to the students on how to draw up reports and bibliography, can go a long way to improve the position. Reading skills can be improved by training. It has also transfer value. So the reading skill acquired in a regional language can be transferred to another language, e.g., English.

Reading is a complex process, which involves close interaction between the eye and the mind. Students at all levels, as well as adults need specific instruction to develop proficiency in visual, functional and perceptual skills that make the difference between laborious, inefficient reading and fluent, efficient reading. The human eye traverses the print in the lines by a series of movements and pauses. Eye movements are characterized by fixations, interfixations, regressions, and return sweeps. The amount of printed materials or the number of words, which a person perceives during each fixation, is called his span of recognition. The wider his span of recognition, the lesser the number of fixations tends to be. The lower the percentage of regression, the greater the efficiency of reading.

The other factors that stand in the way of speed-reading are: (1) Lack of concentration due to external or internal distraction. External distraction may be due to lack of sufficient light, air, furniture, or temperature. It may also be due to noise and wearing uncomfortable clothes, etc. Internal distraction may be due to familial and emotional reasons. (2) Lack of stamina. (3) Lack of motivation and reading interest. (4) Other miscellaneous barriers such as 'word blocking' due to poor vocabulary and inability to infer meaning with the help of context clues, and poor 'readability' because of too many difficult words in a page. These barriers can be overcome to a great extent by: (1) Deciding that we 'really want' to read at an increasing rate. (2) Setting aside at least 30 minutes or more every day for practice reading. (3) Trying to establish a particular time of day for practice so that it soon becomes a regular habit. (4) Not practising when tired. We need to be alert to read well. (5) Selecting materials from a variety of sources: newspapers, magazines, novels etc. (6) Reading the materials as rapidly as possible. (7) Expecting some drop in our present comprehension when we begin to read too fast. (8) Trying to

enlarge our repertoire of vocabulary by finding and studying synonyms, antonyms, adding prefixes and suffixes to words; forming masculine, feminine words and using phrasal verbs.

SQ3R, PQ4R, PQRST and OK4R are some of the study skills/techniques that have been evolved by different authorities in the field. All these techniques—OK4R, Overview, Key ideas, Read, Recall, Reflect, and Review, PQ4R (Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review), PQRST (Preview, Question, Read, Summarize and Test), SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review), PQ4R (Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review) in one way or another aim at reading efficiently with full comprehension. In all these, reading is only the third step. Each step in this method has its own purpose. As an instructional tool the question helps the students to identify the pattern of thought or to clarify meaning. It also establishes the purposes of reading. When we recite, we recall and recall is a powerful aid to retention. The review step, the final step, provides scope for spaced practice and thereby aids retention.

The two popular techniques called SQ3R and PQ4R are more important to second language readers than native readers. PQ4R is a modified version of SQ3R, propounded by Robinson in 1946. The steps in this system are enumerated as follows:

**Preview:** Survey the chapter of a book or a manual in your hand, glancing at the sub-headings, sections and diagrams. Try to imprint the shape of the chapter in your mind. Ensure that you have a broad idea of what it is about and the topic it covers.

**Question:** Construct questions (mostly global) by merely scanning the text frequently, changing the chapter subheadings into questions.

**Read:** Now read each section carefully and critically. Attempt to answer the questions, which you have made up, reading one section at a time.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the text while reading it. Try to understand what it is saying. Think about it critically. If you don't agree with the ideas, try to present them to yourself with supporting evidence.

**Recite:** Go back through the questions to see if you can still answer them. Try to recall the information in the sections. If you cannot remember, re-read and reflect again.

**Review:** Go back over the whole chapter. Try to answer all the questions you have constructed. Check back with the text for any you cannot answer. Finally go right through the whole chapter recalling the main points.

Skimming and Scanning are the two very popular techniques. We skim to get an overview of the material we are planning to read. Read fast and get the gist of the text and spot relevant bits to come back to. Skimming is a reading skill that demands too speed. For the most part, it involves skills in skipping the irrelevant parts and judiciously selecting those that are relevant. The greater the background or familiarity with a field, the greater the facility in skimming. In skimming we need to force our speed to accelerate our reading tempo far beyond that used in our fastest reading material. It is the first stage of scanning. Scanning becomes easier if the skimming activity has been performed earlier. It is used when a reader wishes to cover material in a hurry and when high comprehension is not required. It can be four or six times faster than the average reading speed.

A few steps are followed to skim a chapter. Firstly, remember SQ3R/PQ4R. Set out questions. Then, (1) Note the chapter headings, subheadings and layout of the pages. (2) Look at the end of the

chapter to see if there is a summary. If there is, read it first. (3) If there are any diagrams, check them. It may help us understand the text quickly. (4) Read carefully the first paragraph of the chapter or the first line of each paragraph, which introduces the topic to be covered. (5) Read the last paragraph of the section or the last two or so of a chapter for the conclusion. (6) Then for recall and review, look back over what you have read and string together the topic sentences. This should give a summary of the whole piece.

The merits of skimming are: (1) If a person can skim rapidly, he can improve his average reading speed and study reading speed also. (2) It is a great time and labour saver. (3) It is a useful skill for getting plenty of reference information. (4) Professional people require this for keeping themselves abreast of the new developments in their respective fields. (5) It helps us in book selection of our taste and level. (6) It serves as a consolidation technique for revising reading materials just before appearing in an examination. The demerits are that skimming is a skill, which cannot be used at all times. It does not guarantee comprehension, resulting sometimes, in misunderstanding. The reading material which has not been written in a well-organized style is not suitable for skimming. However, in many cases, we combine both skimming and scanning at the same time. For example, when we look for a name in a telephone directory, or read a newspaper and search for a certain article or look for a word in a dictionary. Scanning is used to look for specific information in a text. When we read at normal speed, we concentrate on the horizontal distance between pauses, but when we scan we also use the vertical distance. Scanning, then, is not fast reading. It normally follows skimming. The exact way in which scanning is used depends on the purpose for which it is used to locate the information quickly. Scanning helps the student search quickly and then slows down to get the specific information he wishes to get from the material.

In order to scan we must keep in mind the following points: (1) Keep in mind only the specific information to be located. (2) Decide which clues will help to find the required information. (3) Move eyes as quickly as possible down the page to find the clues. (4) Read the section containing the clues to get the information needed. After skimming, go through the pages to get the total impression of the text (length, title, author, headings, etc.). (5) Read more slowly the scanned parts. (6) And again scan to review the entire specific information and mentally fix important facts. It requires a great deal of practice to develop the scanning skills. This technique is challenging to the students and helps to alleviate boredom during the class.

Scanning focuses more on locating information than on reading comprehension. So here also comprehension is at risk, as the specific information may sometimes be embedded in the whole text and to elicit the specific information needs understanding the entire passage. From the above mentioned techniques and strategies, what one discerns is that reading-related study skills are as useful for a teacher as they are for the student. The need for incorporating these elements in the English curriculum has become all the more relevant in these days of information explosion.

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