

4 Skills

4.1 Reading

Are you a good reader? Why (not)?

As for the reading process, three theories may be distinguished. The *bottom-up* view (or *outside-in* view) of reading holds that reading is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents in the quest to make sense of the text (Grabe/Stoller 2002:31). Novice readers acquire a set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills that sequentially build toward comprehension ability. Meaning resides in the text on the printed page, and the reader has to reproduce meaning – going from letter to syllable to word to phrase to clause to sentence to paragraph to text. This traditional model of reading has often been under attack as it relies on the formal features of the language, mainly words and structure. It must be admitted, however, that knowledge of linguistic features is also necessary to understand a text.

Bottom-up model

To counteract over-reliance on structure, the *top-down view* (or *cognitive view*) was introduced. Here, the reader rather than the text is at the heart of the reading process. Reading is seen as a psycholinguistic guessing game, in which readers sample the text, make hypotheses, confirm or reject them, make new hypotheses, and so on. In this process, the readers make use of their background knowledge (world knowledge, topic knowledge) and so-called schemata, i.e. “building blocks of cognition” which are used when interpreting sensory data, retrieving information from memory, organising goals and subgoals. If our schemata are incomplete and do not provide an understanding of the incoming data from the text we will face problems understanding the text. In the top-down model the constructive nature of comprehension is emphasized, form and structure, however, are neglected.

Top-down model

The bottom-up, language-based and the top-down, knowledge-based perspectives are integrated in the *interactive view* (or *metacognitive view*). “The ‘construction’ of meaning that occurs in reading is a combination of ‘bottom-up’ processes [decoding and understanding words, phrases and sentences in the text] and ‘top-down ones [our expectations, previous knowledge constructs

Interactive model

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(schemata) of the text content and genre] ... Thus learners should be encouraged to combine top-down and bottom-up strategies in reading" (Ur 1996:141).

bottom-up model	focus on text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from part to whole • from letters to words to paragraphs to sentences to text
top-down model	focus on reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from whole to part • reader: expectations, schemata • background knowledge (world knowledge, topic knowledge), inferencing
interactive model	focus on integration	combination of bottom-up and top-down processes

Supporting the interactive process

Reading instruction can encourage an interactive approach, i.e. a synthesis of bottom-up and top-down processes, in various ways. Language awareness including an awareness of phonemes and the ability to process words automatically and rapidly has to be developed. Before the actual act of reading a text begins, some points should be looked at in order to aid understanding. In pre-reading activities it is important to provide the necessary background information to the reader to facilitate understanding. The reader's existing knowledge before reading the text is drawn on so that background knowledge can be linked to new information more easily and thoroughly. The texts chosen should contain words and grammatical structures familiar to the learners, and teachers can introduce unknown key vocabulary, main ideas and the conceptual framework beforehand. The topics of the texts should be in accordance with the age range, gender, interests, and background culture of the students for whom they are intended. It is also necessary for students to become aware of the purpose for reading, for example the students may be guided to ask themselves: "What do I want to know after reading this passage?" Students must also learn to recognize the type of text before reading, as texts take on different forms and hold certain pieces of information in different places. If they understand the layout of the material being read they can focus more deeply on

the parts that are more densely packed with information. Paying attention to the year a certain text was published may help the reader to anticipate and predict the actual content as can looking at the name of the author and the rest of the reference apparatus (blurb, biographical information, table of contents, foreword, preface, illustrations etc.). Finally students must be able to choose an appropriate reading style (scanning, skimming etc.).

Reading styles	
skimming (reading for gist)	scanning (reading for specific information)
intensive reading (reading for detailed understanding)	extensive reading (reading for global understanding)
reading aloud	silent reading
reading for information	reading for pleasure
critical reading (context, purpose, ideology)	naïve reading

The following book report is written in the style of a bluffer's guide, i.e. a tongue-in-cheek advice on how to sound informed and cheat in literature exams. It is accompanied by a number of tasks to illustrate different reading styles.

The Bluffer's Guide to The Catcher in the Rye

Synopsis

16-year-old Holden Caulfield is in a crisis. He skips school and wanders through New York for three days. ... Afterwards he checks into a sanatorium.

Possible interpretation

The Catcher is the novel of puberty. The main protagonist is having problems adjusting to the educational system. He seeks the kind of beauty and higher truth that isn't taught at school.

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So what's it really about?

16-year-old guy cleverly manages to win over girls' hearts by coming across all sensitive.

Do say:

"Holden is a character both too simple and too complex to fully comprehend. The novel avoids a final judgement, so that the reader is left to decide for himself. One thing's for sure, though: It's a work of great importance."

Don't say:

"Who's catching? Is Hulk Hogan in it?"

Example:
reading tasks

Possible reading tasks may include:

- Skimming: What is this guide about?
- Scanning: What is said about the ...?
- Intensive reading: Analyse the interpretation.
- Reading aloud: Read out the synopsis.
- Did you read this guide for information or for pleasure?
- Critical reading: Is it right to produce such bluffer's guides?

Pros and cons of
reading styles

Each reading style has its benefits and drawbacks. The following survey attempts a summary of the pros and cons of four important styles.

Style	Benefits	Drawbacks
Reading aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practising pronunciation • Same reading speed for all • For younger learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and uniform pace • Focus on phonological surface • Distracting from deep semantic understanding
Silent reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural way of reading • Fast and individual pace • Focus on understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different speeds in class • No pronunciation practice
Intensive reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed understanding • Focus on accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tedious over-analysis • Time-consuming
Extensive reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading much, fast, individually • Reading for pleasure/fun reading • Focus on fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of detailed understanding • Lack of control

Metacognition involves thinking about what one is doing during the reading. Therefore while-reading activities must be integrated to make use of the reader's resources during text processing and encourage active reading. Such strategic readers summarize, question, evaluate, and place a text within their own experience. They try to locate a topic sentence and follow supporting details toward a conclusion, make continuous predictions about what will occur next, establish whole-part relationships, compare and contrast, determine cause-effect, infer, and conclude. These processes may be very difficult to develop in a classroom setting, yet students must be encouraged to enter into a dialogue with what they are reading. In this process, *the 10 commandments for the active reader* may be a humorous reminder.

The active reader

The 10 commandments for the active reader

1. *Thou shalt read a lot.*
 2. *Thou shalt predict what is going to happen next in the text in order to combine what has come before with what will happen after.*
 3. *Thou shalt use your prior knowledge by activating background information and schemata.*
 4. *Thou shalt read as fast as possible by getting used to reading in chunks (groups of words), but also vary your reading speed according to purpose.*
 5. *Thou shalt love reading.*
 6. *Thou shalt have a clear purpose for reading.*
 7. *Thou shalt use different reading strategies for different kinds of reading.*
 8. *Thou shalt concentrate on the important points and skip insignificant pieces.*
 9. *Thou shalt pause at certain places while reading a text to absorb the material being read and sort out information.*
 10. *Thou need not understand every single unknown word but should guess its meaning from context, word family, or other languages.*
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Although while- and after-reading activities sometimes overlap, it seems justified to posit a post-reading stage. The activities in

Post-reading stage

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this third phase depend on the purpose of reading and the type of information extracted from the text. In general, they revolve around (detailed) comprehension, (close) analysis, (creative) production, and (media-oriented) transformation. So teachers may resort to discussing the text in written or oral form, summarizing, posing or answering questions, completing texts, filling in forms as well as writing reading logs, role-playing, creating radio plays, or reading other related materials.

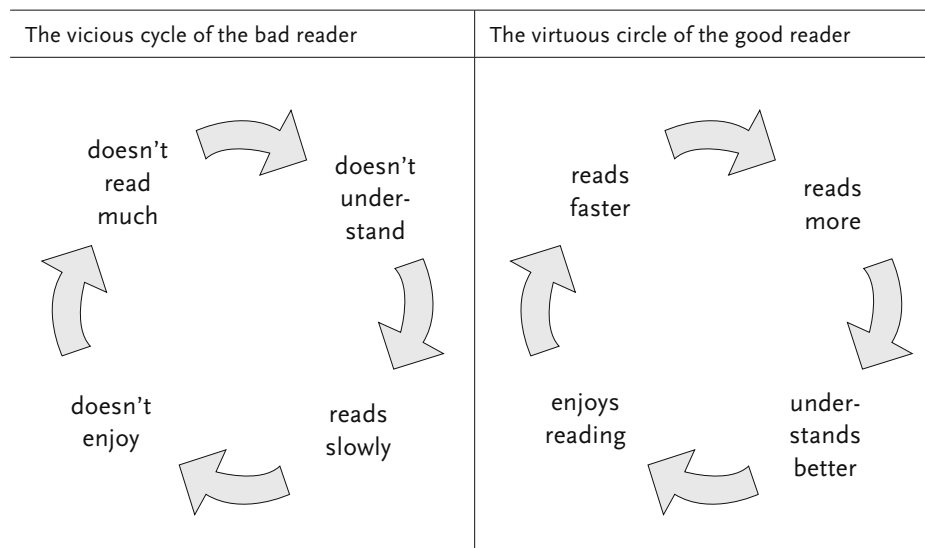
PWP approach

As there are three stages of reading a text, a lesson may be structured along them. The following table summarizes the three stages of the *pwp approach*, including a few ideas for the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages (also see Hinz 1996).

Pre-reading stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • predicting from title, cover, chapter headings, pictures • information on author, date of publication • introduction to plot, topic, main characters, key words • brainstorming, heartstorming, opinion poll • upside down comprehension • writing a short text (on key word, key passage, first sentence) • provocative statement, vote a quote, pyramid discussion • visual media • acoustic impulse
While-reading stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening (CD, teacher's voice) • checking against predictions, guiding questions • completing charts, grids, flow charts, profiles • visualizing, drawing • stopping at key points and reflecting • BUT: don't put the learner off reading ► don't overdo while-reading tasks
Post-reading stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detailed comprehension • close analysis • text production • imagining, changing • visual, auditory, scenic transformation

The virtuous circle

A clear structure of a reading unit along with a well chosen text and motivating tasks may help to set the *virtuous circle of the good reader* in action – and stop the *vicious cycle of the bad reader* (Nuttall 1987).



4.2 Understanding

How can you achieve an understanding of a literary text?

Reading a text is not synonymous with understanding it. If you examine it more closely, you may reach a deeper appreciation of it in the end. To describe this process, various terms are employed, the most common being *analysis* and *interpretation*. The former usually means studying the individual components of a text, the latter tries to explore the potential meanings of it. The term *understanding* is employed here to cover both perspectives.

The process of understanding, i.e. explaining, analysing, interpreting a text, is often called *hermeneutics* (3.2). An important element of this approach is the so-called *hermeneutic circle*, which refers to the notion that your understanding of a text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts, and your understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. It is a circle as neither the whole text nor any individual part of it can be understood without reference to each other.

Modern approaches to literary theory like Reception Theory, Reader Response Theory or Deconstructivism, however, have

Analysis –
interpretation –
understanding

Hermeneutics

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made clear that there is not a single meaning to a text, but a variety of possible meanings dependent on variables like the reader, the social situation or historical period of interpretation. Within the context of the language classroom, this means saying farewell to the existence of a single interpretation dictated by the teacher or some printed model solution. It is the learner-centred process of attributing meaning to a text rather than the product which counts in language lessons.

Criteria of analysis

Learner-centredness – and learning-centredness – should not be mistaken for arbitrariness. The famous *anything goes* does not mean that any interpretation is valid (on the contrary postmodernist analysis is self-conscious and constantly on guard), but students must justify their conclusions and check them against the text. A valuable analysis and interpretation must observe certain criteria such as clarity, precision, comprehensibility, coherence, systematic application of analytical categories, reference to secondary literature (Nünning/Nünning 2004: 24 f.).

Pragmatic view

Although these and other criteria may be helpful guidelines, we should not expect them to lead our students to a full understanding of literature. From a pragmatic point of view, their literary background and their foreign language competence are not elaborate enough to enable an interpretation which satisfies our literary scholars. It is not possible to cover all literary categories, and to probe too deep into any one of them. They first have to understand the basic principles of signification and discourse (meanings of a sentence, syntax, cohesion, coherence etc.). Then they may examine a few aspects of both theme (content) and form (composition) of a text, i.e. the *what* and *how* of it. Such an investigation should not only identify certain thematic and formal characteristics, but also discuss their *functions*, i.e. their effects within and beyond the text.

Global-to-detail approach

To support understanding in the classroom, a literature unit should have a clear structure (Thaler 2012). One approach is based on pre-, while-, and post-reading activities (4.1). A similar way of structuring a reading lesson is the *global-to-detail approach*, which proceeds from a global comprehension of the text to a more detailed one and may end in a deeper understanding. As it requires a double reading of the same text (passage), it is more suitable for shorter texts. The six steps are:

Global-to-detail approach	
<i>Step</i>	<i>Some Activities</i>
(1) Lead-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing topic • Raising motivation • Giving background knowledge (author, period) • Introducing key vocabulary • Setting pre-tasks (e.g. predicting)
(2) First reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skimming text / passage • Silent reading
(3) Global comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions • Answers to pre-tasks
(4) Second reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive reading (aloud) • Scanning
(5) Detailed comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions • Explaining difficult words
(6) Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining rhetorical elements • Exploring potential meanings

4.3 Creating

How can you work creatively with a text?

Apart from reading, analysing and interpreting a text, learners should also be allowed to relate to a text on a creative level. Individually, in pairs or small groups, they may present their personal perspectives on a text (Caspari 1994, Hinz 1996, Thaler 2011). This need not be restricted to the written mode, but can include spoken, visual, scenic, acoustic and manual forms.

Forms of creating

Creating	
<i>Medium</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Written creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative writing (see below)
Spoken creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filling in indeterminacies (<i>Leerstellen</i>) • Reciting in various moods, pitches, volumes

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Scenic creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role playing, acting • Miming, frozen tableau • <i>Hot seat</i> • Interviewing • Making a shadow play, puppet show
Visual creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing pictures, designing collages • Making a comic • Drawing a structure chart (incl. key phrases) • Making a literature magazine
Acoustic creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting the text into sound • Reading with suitable background music
Manual creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing objects from the text • Cooking British food

Creative writing The most popular of these modes of creation, however, still seems to be creative writing. Among the numerous definitions, the one by Holtwisch is particularly suitable for language classroom purposes; he regards those procedures as ‘creative’ “die Texte um-, nach- oder neu gestalten oder sie in andere Medien umsetzen” (Holtwisch 1999:417). Creative writing can serve a lot of linguistic, communicative, affective and social purposes: complementing teacher-centred textual analysis, expressing personal experiences, experimenting with a foreign language, discovering one’s own personality, getting to know other persons, developing one’s own planning and writing strategies, enlarging one’s vocabulary, fostering self-determination and freedom of expression, raising motivation, and improving class atmosphere (Beyer-Kessling 2002:334; Holtwisch 1999:418). These positive effects, however, are dependent on certain conditions. The students’ imagination must be activated by some stimuli, they must get informed about text types and text structures, and they must become aware of writing as a process.

Process view of creative writing Bludau (1998:14) distinguishes between pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Froese (1999:426f.) divides the process of creative writing into four phases: inspiration (collecting ideas), incubation (playful experimenting with material), illumination (writing), and verification (editing and publishing). Kieweg (2003) even offers six stages (idea, structure, writing strategies, first draft, editing, final text). All of these models emphasize how important it is for the teacher to draw students’ attention to writ-

ing as a process. The first version of a text need not be perfect, but can be edited as to form, content, addressee, or spelling.

Before students can start writing, they must get a stimulus and be put into the proper writing mood. Such a stimulus can take on various forms and trigger off different tasks, as the following table shows.

Stimuli for
creative writing

Stimulus	Tasks
Complete text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence switchboards • Transformation tasks (different genre) • Changing the narrative perspective • Changing persons, times, places
Incomplete text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing open-ended stories • Writing the ending • Filling in missing parts • Enlarging a skeleton text
Missing text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing on a title • About myself: I am ..., I like ..., ABCs • Anagrams, acrostics • Responding to a newspaper's problem page • Chain writing, taking turns
Text structure given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parodying a fairy tale • Creating advertisements, responding to an ad • Writing a love story • Designing a crossword puzzle (with the PC)
Acoustic stimulus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associations with noises • Listening to music: collecting words, writing a story
Visual stimulus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a story matching a photo/picture • Cartoon, collages, videos, realia, sculpture • Shape poems

The skill of creative writing has to be developed successively in a long process. Learners need help in the form of instructions, skeletons or schemes to gradually process their ideas. A nice example of skeleton writing, which guides the students step by step to more autonomous writing products and is based on collaborative work, is suggested by Harm (1997). The first step is to give them a "short science-fiction-horror short story" in the form of a framework with different options (boxes) on each level. By following the arrows, they select their own story until they reach

Example of
guided writing

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a box with “The end”. They write down their story and give it to another pupil, which allows some enjoyable reading. The second step is to give them another framework (“a crazy love story”), in which the boxes now are empty. Guided by general instructions (e.g. ‘person’, or ‘place’, or ‘adjective’), they fill in the boxes. Then they exchange their story scheme with one by another pupil and write a story by drawing lines. The final step is for them to create their own framework for writing a short story on a topic like “Life in 2020”.

Example:
rewriting song
lyrics

Another idea is to study the lyrics of a popular song and re-write the text. An amusing example is the theme song for Wikipediatics, i.e. people who spend excessive time at the Wikipedia website. It should be sung to the tune of the Eagles classic *Hotel California*.

Hotel Wikipedia

*On a dark office evening,
Sat down in my chair.
Sharp smell of stale coffee
Circling round in the air.*

*Suddenly on the webpage
There came a flickering light.
My head grew heavy, and my sight grew dim;
I had to stop for the night.*

*There it was in the link list:
"Edit page; you'll do well"
And I was thinking to myself
This could be Heaven or this could be Hell!*

*Then it lit up the quickbar
And it showed me the way.
There were pages begging for clean-up;
I thought I heard them say:*

Welcome to the Hotel Wikipedia
Such a lovely place
So much empty space
Plenty of work at the Hotel Wikipedia
Any time of year
You can find us here...

source: Wikipedia, Wikipediatics Anonymous

Creative writing may also be integrated into longer teaching units. Teaching Unit
 A project centred around fairy tales and covering 16 lessons is suggested by Tendel (2007) for intermediate classes. The students' creative texts are collected in nice folders (portfolios) and illustrated with drawings and photos.

Teaching Unit	
Topic:	Fairy and Fantasy Tales
Aims:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reading fairy and fantasy tales – studying the genre of fairy tale – creative writing – telling stories
Level:	grade 8
Time:	8 double lessons
Procedure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1st double lesson: <i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i> as gapped text, pupils fill in the gaps, read out and correct the different versions in small groups, final grammar focus on past tense – 2nd double lesson: <i>The Three Wishes</i>, first part of text presented in jumbled order, pupils reconstruct the text, study the characteristics of a fairy tale, write the ending of the tale – 3rd double lesson: pupils read and discuss the different endings, 40 coloured photos are put on the floor, each pupil chooses one, in groups of five they justify their choice, then they think of a story in which all five photos play a role, finally they present these stories – 4th double lesson: teacher repeats elements of a fairy tale, pupils write their own fairy tale guided by questions (situation, characters and setting given beforehand)

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Teaching Unit	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 5th double lesson: pupils read out their stories in changing pairs, then they correct two selected stories (preparation for class test) – 6th double lesson: class test – pupils have to write a tale, guided by 14 questions – 7th double lesson: <i>Stille Post</i> – pupils think of a story and tell it to others – 8th double lesson: ten words each for <i>who</i> – <i>where</i> – <i>when</i> – <i>what</i> (verbs) – <i>how</i> (adjectives) are collected on the board, pupils choose two words from <i>who</i>-list and one each from the other lists, then write a 250-word story
Materials:	various fairy tales

Such a time-consuming project means a lot of work for the teacher correcting texts as well as for pupils who have to write, correct and re-write texts. “Trotzdem habe ich dieses Projekt keine Sekunde bereut. Die durchgängige Motivation ... die Neugier auf die entstandenen Geschichten – und wohl auch der Stolz auf das selbst Verfasste – waren so groß, dass wir einige Stunden später, nachdem alle Geschichten abgeschrieben und größtenteils wunderschön illustriert waren, noch einmal eine Stunde lang die *nice folders* herumgereicht und gegenseitig bewundert haben” (Tendel 2007:9).

Tasks

1. Betty Reid is a typical example of a bad reader. Read her letter to Dr. Readgood, who is supposed to help her.

*Dear Dr. Readgood,
My name is Betty Reid. I like talking, dancing, but not reading. I only read when the teacher instructs me to do so – but I never know what for. What I hate most is all the strange words I don't know. So I look up every new word in my dictionary. I take my time reading each word one after the other. To make up for the time lost, I start reading right away,*