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| During your career as a university student, you will need to read a large amount of material related to your field of study. At times, the amount of required reading will seem overwhelming. For this reason, you will need to develop effective strategies to help you cope with the demands of a university student. This unit introduces several strategies that can help you become a more effective and efficient reader, and help you to process the information that you encounter in your reading. |

**Reflection**

**Task 1**

Read the following statements about reading and tick the ones that apply to you. In each case, consider ***why***.

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|  | I often have to read a passage two or three times to understand it. |
|  | I always begin with the first sentence of the text and then read each sentence, in order, until I get to the end. |
|  | I read every single word in the text. |
|  | I spend lots of time looking up new words. |

**Task 2: Strategic Reading**

Look at the text in the box below:

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1. Read the title and predict the focus of the text.
2. Write down 2 or 3 bullet points in the box on the right about what you what to learn from the text.
3. Read the topic sentence (the first sentence of the paragraph), and decide what the focus is going to be.
4. Read the complete text in no more than 3 minutes, but:

* *Do not read every single word; divide the text into phrases*
* *Do not use a dictionary: guess the meaning of unfamiliar words*
* *Focus particularly on signposting language: this may help your understanding*

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| *What specific strategies can improve reading skills?*  In trying to develop reading skills, there are four key areas which students should try to improve: understanding content, flexibility, speed, and language comprehension. Greater understanding comes through more active engagement with the text. Rather than just hoping that understanding will develop passively, it is imperative to examine the text analytically. Increased flexibility comes from not slavishly following the linear order of the text, but by adapting your reading strategies accordingly (e.g., you might decide to read the conclusion of a text first). Turning to the issue of speed, focusing on the content-carrying words of the language and reading in clusters of words (i.e., two-, three-, and four-word phrases) can be beneficial. Finally, greater language comprehension can be realized by focusing more on guessing meaning from context and your general understanding of the English language, and less time on your electronic dictionary. In brief, while reading may appear to be an insurmountable problem, by adapting a few key strategies, significant improvements can be made. |

**Achieving Greater Understanding of Content**

As a student, you do not have time to re-read long texts. It is normal to re-read certain difficult sentences and paragraphs or to re-read important parts of the text, but if you need to read the whole text again and again to understand the content, then the problem is more serious. In your reading, you need to achieve a balance of breadth (*i.e.*, a good overall understanding of the subject) and depth (*i.e.*, a reasonable level of detail). Becoming an **active reader** is the best way to achieve a greater understanding of the text. There are two main strategies for doing this:

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| **Strategy 1: Predict content**  Use the title, subheadings, graphics, and key words to predict what you think will be included in the text. This will “warm up” your brain, and you may find that you already have some knowledge of the topic. |

**Task 3: Using Titles**

Look at the following titles and predict the content, in as much detail as possible, of the text.

1. *Differences in reading strategies among native and non-native readers*

2. *The effects of multitasking in learning environments*

3. *Political regimes and economic growth*

****4. *Rolling flavours: Street food of India*

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| **Strategy 2: Establish a purpose for reading**  It is important to know ***why*** you are reading a text. Ask yourself what you want to learn from the text. You tend to get more out of a text if you are actively searching for answers as you read. For example, when reading the text on the previous page, you might ask yourself the following questions:   * What general skills can I develop and use in my reading? * What are the major problems that non-native speakers face in reading academic texts? |

**Task 4: Asking Yourself Pre-reading Questions**

Look at the four titles in Task 3 again. For each title, think of 1 or 2 questions that you might ask yourself to establish a purpose for reading and help you focus on the content.

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| **Title of the text** | **Possible questions/purposes for reading** |
| 1. *Differences in reading strategies among native and non-native readers* |  |
| 2. *The effects of multitasking in learning environments* |  |
| 3. *Political regimes and economic growth* |  |
| 4. *Rolling flavours: Street food of India* |  |

**Achieving Greater Flexibility**

Academic reading is not like reading a novel: you can read the information in the order that works best for you. You can think of it like making orange juice: you want to squeeze out all the useful information you can (the juice) and then throw the rest of it away.

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| **Strategy 3: Read the “high-value” parts of a text first**  Often the topic sentences (the first sentence in a paragraph), the introduction, and the conclusion contain the main ideas in a text. Thus, it is often possible to understand the overall content of a text by reading only these parts. For example, by reading the topic sentence in the paragraph on improving reading skills, it is clear that there are four particular issues that will be discussed in greater detail in the rest of the paragraph. |

**Task 5: Reading “High-value” Parts of a Text**

The following table contains the introduction and several topic sentences of a text about reforming education. Read these parts of the text and check your understanding by answering the questions that follow.

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| Introduction | From London to Wroclaw, London to Rome, pupils and teachers have been returning to the classroom after their summer break. However, this September, schools themselves are caught up in a global battle of ideas. In many countries education is at the forefront of political debate, and reformers desperate to improve their national performance are drawing on examples of good practice from all over the world. |
| Topic sentence #1 | One reason educators are currently so interested in educational standards is the sheer amount of data available on performance. |
| TS #2 | Another reason is that the Internet and other technology have also made a difference in the approach to educating children. |
| TS #3 | Above all, though, educators now feel that the “three great excuses” for bad schools – lack of money, differences in social class, and differences in culture – may not be as important as was previously believed. |
| TS #4 | The idea that good schooling is about spending money is the one that has been beaten back hardest. |
| TS #5 | Many still insist, however, that social class makes a difference. |
| TS #6 | However, the link between social class and performance is much more variable that many educators suggest. |
| TS #7 | Culture is also an important factor, but again does not provide a complete answer. |
| TS #8 | Although these three factors do not seem to account entirely for school performance, other important themes emerge: decentralisation (handing power back to individual schools); a focus on underachieving students; and high standards for teachers. |

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why has educational performance become an important issue? Which reason is the most important?
2. How many “great excuses” for bad schools does the author discuss? What are these excuses?
3. Which of the excuses is the least valid? Which is the most important?
4. What will be the focus of paragraph #9, paragraph #10, and paragraph #11?

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| How well did you do? (Check your answers with the key below.) If you were able to answer most of the questions correctly, congratulations! Since the original text was ~1,000 words, and you read only ~230 words, you were able to understand the main points of the text by reading only 23% of the text. You thus saved 77% of your time!!! |
| Answers:   1. Three reasons:   a) a large amount of data,  b) technology,  c) previous excuses for bad schools are not important.  The last reason is the most important.   1. Three “excuses”:   a) lack of money,  b) social class,  c) culture.   1. Lack of money is the least valid;   culture is the most important.   1. Paragraph #9 will probably talk about decentralization;   paragraph #10 will probably talk about underachieving students; and  paragraph #11 will probably talk about standards for teachers. |

**Achieving Greater Speed**

Reading every word in a text is simply not effective. Not only does it take too long, but it actually makes comprehension more difficult. It is important to see how the text works as a whole, rather than as a series of individual words. Two useful strategies for increasing your speed are: 1) reading in phrases, and 2) focusing on content words.

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| **6058142799_d4422a8fe2_z[1]Strategy 4: Read in phrases**  It is usually possible to break down English texts up into phrases of three or four (or even more) words. An increase in speed can be achieved by focusing on the phrases as a whole, instead of focusing on each individual word. |

**Task 6: Reading Phrase by Phrase**

The following sentence is taken from paragraph #4 of the article about educational reform. However, the sentence has been broken up into phrases for you, and these phrases are arranged vertically. Read the sentence as fast as you can, keeping your eyes in the center of each phrase, and moving your eyes down vertically, instead of moving them horizontally across the page.

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| Many of the 20 wealthiest countries  doubled or tripled  their education spending  between 1970 and 1994,  yet outcome  in many countries  stagnated – or even went backwards. |

If you completed this task correctly, your eyes only needed to move 6 times, whereas if you read word-by-word, your eyes would need to move 25 times!!!

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| **Strategy 5: Focus on content words**  Focusing on content words (e.g., nouns and verbs) rather than structure words (e.g., prepositions and articles) not only increases reading speed, but also allows you to gain a general understanding of the information that is most important. |

**Task 7: Reading for Content Words**

The following sentence is also taken from paragraph #4 of the article about educational reform. However, the structure words have been blackened out, leaving only the content words. Read the sentence and then check your understanding with a partner. Were you able to understand the sentence without the structure words?

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| Such spending is highest in the United States; yet America lags behind other developed countries on overall outcomes in secondary education. |

**Achieving Greater Language Comprehension**

An understanding of how words work, and how they relate to each other, can help in your comprehension of the text – in particular, how the text develops and how texts are organized.

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| **Strategy 6: Guess the meaning of words**  Constantly looking up words is very time-consuming. Although electronic dictionaries can speed up the process, it still takes time, slows down the reading process, and interferes with comprehension. There may be many clues in the text that you can use to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. Most of the time, an approximate meaning of the word is enough; you do not need to know the *exact* meaning.  **Contextualization**: Guess the meaning of the word from context. Put in a likely synonym and see whether it makes sense. For example, consider the following sentences: “*reading in clusters of words (i.e., two-, three-, or four-word phrases) can be beneficial*.” Imagine “*clusters*” was not there; what could you put in its place? Perhaps “*groups*”. This meaning is confirmed by the definition that follows (*i.e., two-, three-, or four-word phrases).*  **Prefixes and suffixes**: The beginning and ending of a word may contain parts that tell you something about the meaning. For example, consider the word, *autobiography*. *Auto* = “self”; *bio* = “living”; and *graphy* = “writing”. Thus, an autobiography is something written by a person about their own life.  **Word families**: Although you may not be able to recognize a word, you might recognize words that have the same root. For example, the word *unity* may be unfamiliar to you, but *united* is relatively common. From this (and the knowledge that that *–ity* is a common suffix for nouns), it is possible to understand that *unity* means *the state of different parts being combined into a whole*. |

**Task 8: Dealing with Unfamiliar Vocabulary**

Read the following introductory paragraph of an essay about immigration and guess the meanings of the underlined words. Discuss with a partner the clues that helped you understand the meanings.

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| This is not a good time to be foreign. Anti-immigrant parties are gaining ground in Europe. Britain has been **fretting** over **lapses** in its border control. In America, Barack Obama has failed to deliver the immigration reform he promised, and Republican presidential candidates would rather **electrify** the border fence with Mexico than educate the children of illegal immigrants. America educates foreign scientists in its universities, but then expels them from the country. This **illiberal** turn in attitudes to migration is no surprise. It is the result of **cyclical** economic **gloom** combined with an increasing pressure on rich countries’ borders. However, governments now weighing up whether or not to try to **slam** the door should consider another factor: the growing economic importance of immigrants and the contribution they can make to a country’s economic growth. |

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| **Strategy 7: Unpack complex sentences and complex noun phrases**  Academic writing often contains long, complex sentences and complex noun phrases. These complex structures can make understanding difficult. In order to understand the meaning of particular sentences or phrases, it is often useful to break them down grammatically, or “unpack” them. For example, consider the following sentence:  **6058142799_d4422a8fe2_z[1]**   |  | | --- | | *Electronic waste contains significant amounts of valuable metals such as silver, gold, and copper that make it attractive to recycle.* |   Although this sentence may, at first, be difficult, a grammatical analysis can make understanding easier. This sentence contains two clauses: *Electronic waste contains significant amounts of valuable metals such as silver, gold, and copper* is an independent clause (or main clause), while *that make it attractive to recycle* is a dependent clause (or subordinate clause). Identifying the subject, verb and object of the main clause makes the sentence easier to understand: *Electronic waste contains valuable metals*. The subordinate clause means: *recycling this waste is attractive*.  Similarly, it is it often useful to “unpack” complex noun phrases by identifying the head noun of the phrase (see Unit 3). The head noun can tell you the focus or “heart” of the phrase. For example, consider the following sentence:   |  | | --- | | *Many small fires which are burning away the plastic covering from valuable wire in the electronic waste contribute to the acrid air pollution which damages the health of those who inhale it.* |   This is a simple sentence, with a subject, verb, and object. However, the subject and object are complex noun phrases. Identifying the verb (*contribute to*) and the two head nouns (*fires* and *pollution*), leaves us with the sentence *fires contribute to pollution* – a sentence which is much easier to understand. |

**Task 9” “Unpacking”**

Unpack the following sentences by identifying the independent and dependent clauses and by identifying the head nouns in any complex noun phrases.

1. Electronic waste contains a variety of poisonous substances such as lead, mercury and arsenic that leak into the ground and threaten the water supply and agricultural land.
2. The problem is that a large percentage of electronic waste that is sold off for recycling in wealthy countries is sold and diverted to the developing world – to countries like China.
3. Unfortunately, in most of the world, the bulk of all this waste ends up in landfills, where it poisons the environment.
4. Unfortunately, under current policies, domestic processing of e-waste is not compulsory, and while shipping waste abroad is ethically questionable, it is still more profitable than processing it safely in the USA.

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| **Strategy 8: Look for cohesion and signposting language**  Good writers use a range of language in the text to tell the reader what kind of information is coming up next. This signposting language can serve as a useful map when trying to understand texts. |

**Task 10: Using Signposts**

Re-read the paragraph about improving reading skills. The version below has 5 examples of signposting language underlined. For each of the underlined words or phrases, discuss with a partner the meaning of these signposts, and how you might use these signposts for better reading comprehension.

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| *What specific strategies can improve reading skills?*  In trying to develop reading skills, there are four key areas which students should try to improve: understanding content, flexibility, speed, and language comprehension. Greater understanding comes through more active engagement with the text. Rather than just hoping that understanding will develop passively, it is imperative to examine the text analytically. Increased flexibility comes from not slavishly following the linear order of the text, but by adapting your reading strategies accordingly (e.g., you might decide to read the conclusion of a text first). Turning to the issue of speed, focusing on the content-carrying words of the language and reading in clusters of words (i.e., two-, three-, and four-word phrases can be beneficial. Finally, greater language comprehension can be realized by focusing more on guessing meaning from context and your general understanding of the English language, and less time on your electronic dictionary. In brief, while reading may appear to be an insurmountable problem, by adapting a few key strategies, significant improvements can be made. |

**Task 11: Brainstorming**

Work with a partner or small group to brainstorm signposting language for the following functions. An example for each function is given to get you started.

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| enumeration (listing) | * There are three … * A further (reason/cause/benefit) is … |
| Compare/contrast | * Rather than … , … * However, … |
| Cause/effect | … may result in …  Consequently, … |

**Task 12: Using Signposts**

Recognizing signposts can also help to distinguish between the author’s point of view and the viewpoints of others.

Read the following sentences. What is the author’s point of view? What signpost clues helped you to decide?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A. | The traditional method to teaching writing focuses on the final product with an emphasis on the correct use of grammatical forms, vocabulary choice, and paragraph structure. However, this type of product-based orientation can create serious problems. |

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| B. | Many people believe that university graduates can obtain a higher paying job and thus enjoy greater lifetime earnings throughout their career. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), however, the earning potential of a university graduate at a top university may not actually cover the initial costs of the degree. |

|  |  |
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| C. | The Fukushima accident in 2015 highlights the dangers of using nuclear energy as a power source, resulting in an international call for a complete ban of nuclear power station. While it is important to establish regulations on the use of nuclear energy, such a ban neglects the problems associated with alternatives energy sources. |



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| **Useful Resources**   * <http://online-resources.lc.cityu.edu.hk/WebPages/OnlineResources/> - The LC’s English Language Support Services homepage has a number of helpful practice activities for the improving your reading. Scroll down to “Reading >> Reading Strategies”. * The [website](•%09http:/online-resources.lc.cityu.edu.hk/WebPages/OnlineResources/) also gives numerous texts with comprehension questions in which you can practice the strategies introduced in this unit. Scroll down to “Reading >> General Practice”. <http://online-resources.lc.cityu.edu.hk/WebPages/Resource/Index/74?level=4> |