



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

Copyright and terms of use

IIT Madras is the sole owner of the content available in this portal - onlinedegree.iitm.ac.in and the content is copyrighted to IIT Madras.

- Learners may download copyrighted material for their use for the purpose of the online program only.
- Except as otherwise expressly permitted under copyright law, no use other than for the purpose of the online program is permitted.
- No copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or exploitation, commercial or otherwise of material will be permitted without the express permission of IIT Madras.
- Learner acknowledges that he/she does not acquire any ownership rights by downloading copyrighted material.
- Learners may not modify, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale, create derivative works, or in any way exploit, any of the content, in whole or in part.

English I (Basic English)
Ms Deepa B Kiran
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Reading Shorter and Longer Texts

Welcome, we are going to look at reading, shorter texts and longer texts. Today with the mobile, the shorter the better the information, seems to be the way we are heading. We are all used to acronyms, to very brief, to summaries, to bullet points, to crunched ideas and concepts. So, shorter reading is perhaps something we are more familiar with as of today. Even in fiction, we have what are called micro stories or micro tales, which are rather common 6-word stories, 10-word stories.

I mentioned these in the context of the ideas floating around today that attention spans are lower, no one can focus longer. Well, if we have to buy that theory and agree with it, then we could say that shorter texts are easier to read. They take less time, perhaps less focus and effort, they are done with quickly they finish fast. And maybe we can even memorize or remember them far more easily. That is true and valid about shorter texts to quite an extent.

Again, when we talk of texts, we talk of fiction and we talk of nonfiction both. Fiction could be short stories. We also have poetry we have essays. These are shorter texts in the area of literature. We also have the scientific texts on history, geography, information technology, biochemistry, you name it. What is the purpose of reading a shorter text? More often than not in a shorter text there is one simple small key idea which the author is presenting to you. And which the author is also supporting and substantiating with relevant examples, and explanations, and sometimes maybe even some exercises and activities and worksheets.

So, in a sense, perhaps, the shorter text is easier to approach I do agree. But it also is something that requires a lot of alertness and focus. One can tend to be laid back and say, this is a shorter text, okay, no big deal. We might be caught off that. So, when you approach a short text, approach it like a little chocolate that a little child would eat, as grown ups, we will probably unwrap it, just pop it in our mouth keep talking to somebody and we are half eating the chocolate and half lost in our conversation. But a child will sit down, unwrap the chocolate, put it in the mouth, drool, enjoy each and every bit of the bite.

In a similar way, when you are reading a shorter text, give it your all, give it your focus, give it your attention. Go with all the curiosity. What is it that the author is saying in this space? How is it that she or he is saying it? What are they giving that very clearly, cleverly or not

cleverly, it is up to you to observe. Which is substantiating that key critical idea. What is the author doing to help me as a reader understand this key idea better? Approaching a short text with this will be very helpful. Because then you can put down your little notes.

What are the key ideas? How was it introduced? How was it substantiated? And how was it concluded? In that sense, a shorter text is easier to start and finish. As a reader, it gives you a certain sense of accomplishment, achievement, yes, I have done it, I have completed it, I have got this idea.

So short texts are also good for the confidence when we have a choice between a short text and a longer text, and if you are at that point, anxious and not feeling entirely confident, you could go for the short texts, complete it feel much more confident and then approach the larger longer text. Speaking of the larger and the longer texts, again, we have the novels we have, let us say biographies, philosophical works all of these would be literary works.

Literary works, the reading of those longer texts, again, would have a different approach. Where we have the liberty of allowing ourselves to enjoy the text, of allowing ourselves to stop and mull and reflect on the beauty of the words or the ideas there in, the connections with our own life.

It is more like taking a walk, if we were reading it, for leisure, but of course, if the same text is being read as part of the curriculum, then apart from allowing ourselves to enjoy the text, we also are making notes in terms of if it is fiction, the plot, the characters, the framework, the story progression, the sequencing, how each character is getting defined and progressing and growing in the story.

What are the frictions and the interrelations between the characters? What are the situations that are offering these? These are things we would look at, in a piece of literature, or fictional work? Perhaps philosophical or biographical, we are also going to be analyzing the journey of the protagonist in philosophy works, we are reflecting on our own lives, our thought processes, the relationships, these have for us.

Coming to longer texts, which are in the category of concepts, again, such as biotechnology, or genetics, or mathematics, or artificial intelligence. How are we approaching a nice big fat textbook? Well, here I am showing a physical, big fat. Today, we live in times where a lot of the reading is happening digitally. So, let us just say something that occupies a lot of

memory. One of those texts, what are we keeping in mind when we approach a text of this nature, whether it is a concept one, for some, a big book could be overwhelming.

I would like to share a quotation here for how one can approach a big long text. It says, "how do you eat an elephant? You eat it, slice by slice." Well, I am certainly not recommending non-vegetarianism, or the killing and eating of elephants. This was an example to talk about the idea of how when something seems extremely overwhelming, and big and too much to handle a simple thing is to chunk it down, is to break it up into bits and pieces. Usually, a longer text is by itself already broken up into chapters, more often than not, which makes life easy for us.

So, we can look at, I am going to work on chapter one, or I am going to look at the foreword, and introduction today, chapter 1 tomorrow, chapter 2 day after. Whatever works for you in a more practical and balanced manner. So, you could actually have an approach of saying that this long text, I am going to finish in 21 days, one chapter a day or 2 chapters a day. Well, this might sound like 21 days to finish that book, perhaps that is a better option than not reading it at all. Do not you think it is worth considering? So, longer texts can really be seen as a set of short texts put together for the purpose of getting ourselves to finish that test.

So, each time you finish one chapter, you give yourself a pat on the back and say, good job. You have completed chapter one. It just makes it a little easier, builds our sense of confidence as we go ahead. So, I highly recommend planning out a schedule for the reading of the text, particularly when it is a longer text. And if you are wondering, should I do 2 chapters a day? Should I do 3 chapters a day? So, here is a little story.

There was once a young boy who reached a new town, he wanted to visit the temple that was on the top of the hillock. He turned to a stall nearby, there was an old lady there, and he asked Amma, how long to reach the temple on top. She looked at him, and she continued her work. The boy thought how rude of her. And then he started walking. And slowly climbing up the hill. The old woman shouted out 15 minutes. And the little boy looked back and shouted, why did not you tell me when I asked them? The old woman said, I had to see at what pace you walk.

Well, that story connects back to the idea of how do we schedule a longer text. Once you read a chapter or 2, you will get a sense of the rhythm and the pace at which you are able to read that particular text. So, then you could design the rest of the days of your schedule and say

yes, looks like I will be able to do 2 chapters a day or one chapter a day. And how many hours you schedule for it. So, that could be cracked by actually getting your feet wet in the water. But actually, doing the reading.

With shorter takes sometimes you could get away without writing down, making notes, jotting down the ideas with longer texts, reading of them, it is going to be rather challenging to read without making notes, without doing your highlights, the comments, the doodling or sketch noting, whatever works for you. But putting down in writing at the end of each chapter.

That is almost an essential must when it comes to reading of longer texts. Given the fact that the text is long, there is much more to remember. In order to progress to the next chapter, the writing comes in extremely handy and extremely helpful. Eventually, that is what will give you the whole picture of the text and to be able to gather and seal it all for you by the very end. We are quite likely to have forgotten what we read and understood in chapter one by the time we came to chapter 4. Often authors will reference back to something from a previous chapter and then we are left struggling if we have not made our notes.

So, when we look at longer texts, it is absolutely essential to make our highlights our notes, our summary of each chapter, before we progress to the next one. As part of the summarizing and making of notes, it would be a good idea to identify key words at the end of each chapter, specific vocabulary, definitions of terminologies, important diagrams and formulas, if any, and this together would be a comprehensive note making, which will be easy to reference back later as well. It is also in the process of making these notes that we realize what we have understood and what we have not.

Sometimes what seems to be ‘yeah I got this’, when you actually sit down to write it, and especially in your own words, then you realize, how clearly have you understood it? How well did you comprehend? Richard Feynman, the famous physicist, Nobel laureate, would say that if you have learned a concept, and you cannot explain it to a fifth-class child, without hiding behind big, big, big terminologies, then perhaps you have not understood it right? When we make our notes, and when we keep in mind, the key words, the difficult vocabulary, the terminologies, the definitions, the main concepts and ideas, the examples, the diagrams, the important formulas, dates, whatever is critical to that.

And we put that together, then it really is a reference for us. Of what is it that we understood how well did we understand? And how clearly are we able to articulate what we comprehended? Because one aspect of learning is to read texts like this. But another critical and more important aspect is to be able to communicate and articulate what we have learned what we have read. So especially with longer texts, it would be extremely helpful to make such notes at the end of each and every chapter.

This means you might be required to go back to the text back and forth, revise, look up the thesaurus look up particular Google search, ask friends, colleagues, classmates, teachers, your peers at work. All of which will be required before you finally make your notes. But what it really implies is that whatever you have read, you have not only got it, clearly, you have got it right in your memory, you have got a great reference file for yourself, just in case you forget, which we are likely to. So, this would be a great way to look at a longer text, it is a great service, you are going to do to yourself, for all that time that is being invested in understanding that text.

You are ensuring that it is worth it. You harvested it to the fullest, you have clarity, you have comprehension, you can remember it better. And whatever you cannot remember, you can reference it and go back to it and pull it out of your notes file better. And in essence, by the end of it, you have strung together the key ideas of each chapter. The key supporting metaphors, examples, explanations, definitions.

So really, you have your own draft version of the text that the author wrote. In this process, you also have a way to understand how a writer's mind works. So, each time we read a new text, we have benefited from having gone through this entire process of reading by chunking down a long text of reading by making notes for a long text and a lot of this becomes a habitual pattern with us if it is practiced regularly and consistently. When this becomes a habitual pattern, it is surely going to also boost your confidence as a reader. I hope this was helpful. Thank you and wish you all the best with reading of shorter and longer texts.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:32)



Shorter Texts

Characteristics

1. Can be completed quickly
2. Remembering is more likely
3. One can concentrate and give attention to details



Longer Texts

Characteristics

1. Can be overwhelming in terms of volume
2. Long-drawn process of completion
3. Not easy to recollect
4. Can be more difficult to comprehend



Things to keep in mind while reading longer texts

1. Try to restrain from getting overwhelmed
2. Break it down and chunk it down into bits
3. Plan out a schedule for chapter-wise or number-of-pages-wise reading
4. Make notes, highlight, add comments
5. Identify and note: keywords, difficult vocabulary, important terms and phrases, significant diagrams etc.

6. Understand and go over important sections of text multiple times to ensure comprehension
7. Pull out the key concept in each chapter and make notes for the same

Thus simplify the process, improve comprehension and increase recall value

