

USING THE OXFORD BOOKWORMS LIBRARY

Key concepts in Extensive Reading

Extensive Reading (ER) programmes come in many shapes and sizes. There is no single ‘best way’. But if the result is students doing lots of reading, then *that* is a good programme.

Whatever the approach, Extensive Reading should always be underpinned by three key concepts.

Comfort

Make sure that students are always reading *inside* their own linguistic ‘comfort zone’. Extensive reading is only effective when students can read with ease and are not distracted by struggles with unknown words and unfamiliar structures. If they find a text too difficult, encourage them to try a lower language level. The purpose of their reading is not to meet new and difficult language, but to develop reading fluency and life-long reading skills.

Choice

We don’t all like the same kinds of book. Some people like ghost stories, some like mysteries, some like love stories, and some prefer real-life stories and non-fiction. Don’t be prescriptive. Don’t tell your students what *you* think they ought to want to read. Let them choose. Choice is empowering. It is also one of the steps along the road to becoming an autonomous learner.

Even a choice of just a few titles is fine, and in the early stages it can be a good idea not to overwhelm students with too wide a choice.

Enthusiasm

It is often said that an enthusiastic, committed teacher is the essential requirement, the linchpin of any successful extensive reading programme. A teacher who is a keen reader, and enthusiastic about books and stories and reading, will be a role model for students.

Share the reading experience with your students. Talk about the books with them. Remember the ‘Harry Potter’ effect. It can be cool to read books!

Getting started . . .

Students may be reluctant to read, but are rarely immune to the lure, the suspense, the what-happens-next of a good story. Try to tempt them into storytelling before they start reading:

- Read a few pages aloud to them (or play the recording). Stop at an interesting moment.
- Show one illustration from a book and ask them to invent a storyline to fit the picture.
- Give them six back-cover blurbs and ask them to match them with the book titles.

Explain the benefits of extensive reading, and how it will improve not only their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but all four language skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Keeping going . . .

Once students have begun reading, it is important to keep the momentum up.

- Offer lots of praise and encouragement.
- Set reading targets (read a book a week, or five books a term, or a million words, or ...)
- Assign students a reading partner or buddy with whom to plan and discuss their reading.

Following up . . .

How can teachers check that their students are actually doing the reading? Here is a simple but effective way, which at the same time encourages reader response to the stories. Ask students just one question, like one of these:

- 1 What was the most important moment for you in this story?
- 2 Which character did you like best? Why?

Only a short answer is needed, but because it is a personal opinion students cannot copy it from somewhere else. Answers can be recorded

- orally, in a reading interview with the teacher
- by writing in a personal reading diary
- by an entry in a class reviews book or chart
- by a note on an opinion card in the book.

Follow-up work can include Bookworms activities, acting plays, retelling stories in drama, making posters, devising book quizzes, holding competitions, even running an extensive reading festival. Reading provides a huge resource for meaningful language practice.

FAQS (Frequently Asked Questions)

1 *What is a class reader?*

This is when all students in a class are reading the same reader. Students usually read at home, and some follow-up exercises or tests are done in class. Class readers are a useful way of getting students started, but reading fluency will only really be developed by individualized extensive reading.

2 *Is it a good idea for students to read aloud in class?*

No, not really, unless it is dialogue practice or play reading. Reading narrative aloud is difficult for learners; they worry about their pronunciation, fail to concentrate on meaning, provide a poor model to the listeners, and everybody's enjoyment of the story suffers.

3 *How can I set up a class library?*

If there are no school funds to buy books, each student in the class can be asked to buy one graded reader (or two). If everybody buys a different title, the class will have a library of 30 or 40 books. Keep track of students' reading by getting them to record their name, book title, dates of borrowing, and opinions – perhaps by drawing 'smileys' (one smiley for 'all right', three smileys for 'brilliant'). This can be done on a wall chart or on library cards kept in the books.

4 *What is DEAR time and how does it help?*

Drop Everything And Read (also called SSR, Sustained Silent Reading). Make sure that students always have a book with them, and from time to time announce 15 or 20 minutes DEAR time. Everybody reads, including the teacher, which demonstrates the value of reading and helps to establish a reading community.

5 *Should my students use dictionaries while they are reading?*

No. To develop fluency in reading students must learn to ignore unknown words and phrases, or to guess an approximate meaning, and move on. If too many words in a text are unknown, then the student is reading at too high a level, and should try books at a lower level.

6 *How can I use Bookworms audio recordings?*

Ideally, students should be able to borrow CDs from the library and listen at home. If that is not possible, try to fit in some 'serial' listening at the end of a class. Listening and reading at the same time can increase reading speed because students don't go back to check things.

7 *Should my students write summaries of the books they have read?*

Writing a summary of a book is a complex task, and what is the point of it? People who read for pleasure in the real world do not write summaries of what they read. But writing a report or a review of a book for a teacher or fellow students has a genuine purpose. Students can express their opinions freely, learn to avoid 'spoilers' (giving away the plot or the ending), and comment on the issues raised by the story. Book reviews can be printed in a class newspaper, posted on the school intranet, or put into a classroom postbox, for an end-of-term competition and prize for the best review.

8 *How do I measure the success of an Extensive Reading programme?*

One of the best measures of success in ER is when a student goes on to read another book, and then another, and another . . . Extensive reading is not a quick fix; the benefits are subtle and incremental. The more students read, the more their language will be nourished by the rich and varied food that extensive reading provides. The ultimate goal of any extensive reading programme is to help students become confident, enthusiastic, and life-long readers.

Using Reading Circles *Mark Furr*

As well as the *Bookworms Club* books, it is also possible to use Reading Circles with full-length texts. Students in the reading group read the same Bookworm, and meet several times to talk about their reading. For details on how to run Reading Circles, see the *Bookworms Club Reading Circles Teacher's Handbook*. This can also be downloaded from:

www.oup.com/elt/bookworms

Using Factfiles *Christine Lindop*

The way into non-fiction texts is usually best done by finding out students'

- existing knowledge of the topic
- attitudes and opinions on the topic.

Photographs and book titles can be used as prompts, and students can work in teams to write down, for example, three facts and three opinions about the topic. These can be put on a wall chart, which students can later correct or add to after they have read that Factfile.

After Reading

With non-fiction texts, students are encouraged to relate what they have read to their own experience, environment, or culture. They can prepare their own 'mini-Factfiles' as a poster or internet web-page, write reader reports, and devise quizzes for their classmates.

Where English is used as the medium for teaching other subjects, in CLIL programmes (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Factfiles also have a cross-curricular role.

Using Playscripts *Clare West*

Performing a play for an audience is a great confidence-boosting, team-building exercise. Students who are reluctant to perform can still be involved, in making props, stage-managing, prompting, writing programme notes, etc.

Play-readings can also be dynamic. Students can rehearse their parts and use eye contact and lively intonation as they speak their lines.

Getting started

Always choose a Bookworms Playscript below your students' language level (this helps with learning lines). If you'd like most of the class to have acting parts, choose a play with many characters, like *Much Ado About Nothing*.

A way to interest students in the play is to bring realia to the classroom, and ask them to suggest storyline ideas based on the realia, e.g.

- Monopoly money for *One Thousand Dollars*
- a skull mask and a plastic sword for *Hamlet*
- a black jacket (for you to wear!) and cucumber sandwiches for *The Butler Did It* or *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Working with dialogue

It's usually more valuable to help students become really familiar with a short section of dialogue than simply reading a whole play. Here is one way of doing that:

- read aloud or play a recording of the dialogue to the class (with books closed)
- students then read the text silently and check comprehension
- they listen and read at the same time
- they listen and repeat chorally
- they read the dialogue aloud in pairs
- they shadow the dialogue (i.e. listen and read with the recording or teacher)
- they think about their use of space, posture, movement, and expression
- they practise their dialogue in pairs until they have learnt their lines and feel confident about performing it to their classmates.

Motivation

Students need support at first, if they have not acted or performed before. It's also important that everyone keeps their promises to learn lines and turn up to rehearsals. This shared sense of responsibility is a powerful motivator, and can create a really good classroom atmosphere.

§ § §

Fiction, non-fiction, playscripts, seven language levels, more than 200 graded readers – in the Oxford Bookworms Library there is something for everyone. We wish you and your students many happy hours of Bookworms reading.

Jennifer Bassett

Series Editor, Oxford Bookworms Library
Read and enjoy, read to learn