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BSc Degree

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English II (Advanced English)

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Developing Reading Skills

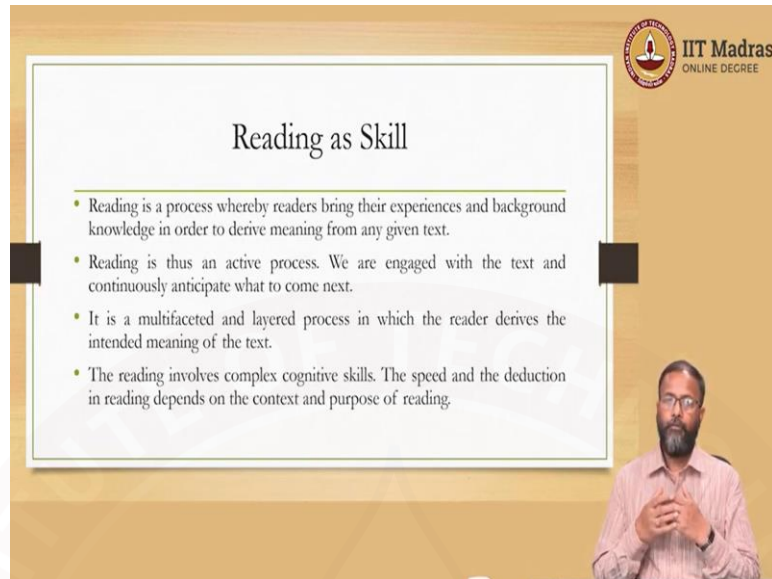
Welcome to class. Today, we are going to talk about how to develop effective reading skill. As we know, orality is the normal, natural phenomenon of language. So, languages are primarily oral. And our understanding and command on, or proficiency in a particular language are reflected in terms of our four integrated skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Listening and speaking are the primary, fundamental nature of language. So, language is primarily oral. And if you look at the development of stages of the language, in human history, reading and writing have come very late; they have evolved very late. And reading and writing skills are crafted skills with the script at the centre.

Now, when we say script or when we say 'writing system' in a language, we are essentially referring to the orthographic representation of sounds in terms of certain orthographic symbols. And writing is a deliberate recording device. So, people did not have electronic recorders, video recorders, audio recorders, so how to record the speech? And that need generated the development of these script and alphabets.

So, scripts to language is later development, but primarily, language is oral. So, listening and speaking are two skills which are primary to language. Reading and writing are crafted skills acquired very cautiously with instructions.

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Reading as Skill

- Reading is a process whereby readers bring their experiences and background knowledge in order to derive meaning from any given text.
- Reading is thus an active process. We are engaged with the text and continuously anticipate what to come next.
- It is a multifaceted and layered process in which the reader derives the intended meaning of the text.
- The reading involves complex cognitive skills. The speed and the deduction in reading depends on the context and purpose of reading.

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Today, we are going to talk about reading skills; how to develop reading skills. Now, first and foremost, we need to understand, when we say 'reading', what do we mean? So, reading refers to recognizing these orthographic symbols arranged in a particular order in a printer format. So, what we are doing? You are presented with a text, and if you know the script, if you know the orthographic representation of each of the sounds of the language? You may be familiar with the word, but when the word that we are familiar, is not written in your familiar script, you cannot read.

So, scripts come at the centre of your reading and writing skills. So, it is a process; reading is a process whereby the readers bring their experiences and background knowledge in order to derive meaning from any given text. And if you draw a parallel between reading and listening, the only difference you get is that in listening, you get oral texts, certain sound waves and frequencies that hit your eardrum and the total auditory system.

Here, in reading, the same sounds are represented in certain symbols in a printed format. So, you are familiar with the language, but you need to recognize the alphabets and script, then only you can read. So, you have to be very well versed in the alphabet and script of that language. So, given that you know roman alphabets and you know the writing system in English, so we are talking about how to develop reading skills in English.

So, reading is a process, a conscious process where you, as a reader, bring in your experience and background knowledge in order to derive meaning out of a given text. Meaning is not only codified in the text. We will not talk about meaning theories here, but we need to understand that in deriving meaning out of a text, your background knowledge experience and other referential expressions and information do play a role. And that is why we define reading as an act that brings in experiences of the reader and the background knowledge of the reader in order to derive meaning out of a given text; that is what reading all about.

So, thus it is an active process, and we are engaged with the text and continuously anticipate what to come next. So, you are not a passive receiver of the text. The moment you start reading, you are equally involved and engaged with the text. And when you are engaged with the text, then while reading the text, you also anticipate what is coming next because the text is arranged in a logical order, sentences are meaningful and arranged in logical order.

And the human mind is able to anticipate what comes next. With a little variation, you are able to guess, and that makes our speed of reading faster. So, it is a multi-faceted and multi-layered process in which you, as a reader, derive the intended meaning of the text. And always remember, every text carries some intended meaning. And the reader derives that meaning, the intended meaning of the text. Not necessarily all the time; the literal meaning of a text or a word or an utterance is the real meaning.

So, a lot of other skills also come into the picture, lots of other background knowledge comes into the picture, like your knowledge about the context, your knowledge about the socio-cultural background of the language, your knowledge about the idioms, your knowledge about metaphorical use of expressions in the language. So, we have to have an overall understanding of the language in order to develop a good reading habit and get the best outcome of it.

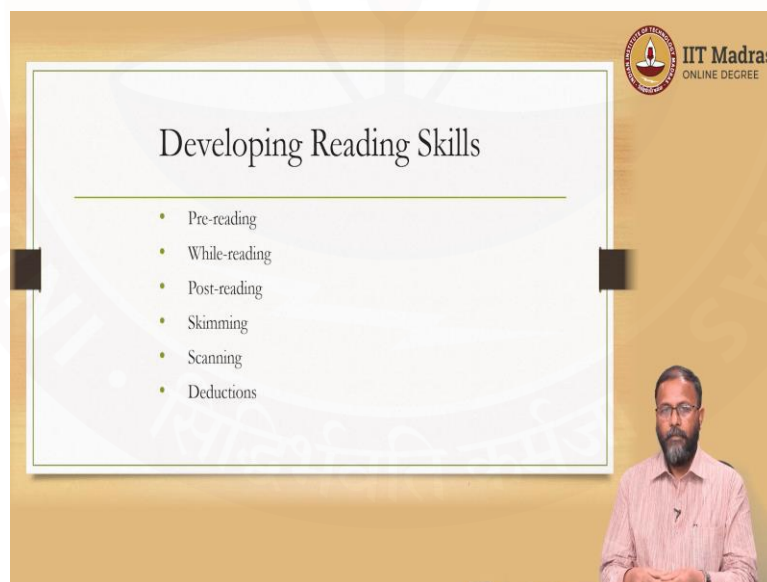
So, it is a multi-faceted and multi-layered process; it is not simply reading through the lines and getting meaning out of it. Meaning is a very complex phenomenon, and it is well-grounded in the socio-cultural context of the text and the language and that you need to understand. So, reading in that sense then involves a complex cognitive skill. The speed at which you read and the deductions that you make out of reading texts depend on your familiarity with the context and your familiarity with the socio-cultural background of the language.

So, that is why reading is a complex cognitive activity, a complex, multi-faceted, multi-layered process. So, it is not a passive skill; it is a very active and receptive skill. We call it receptive, not passive. So, listening and reading are called receptive skills. So, I hope now you are sensitive towards and aware of the complexity of reading and making sense out of it.

Now, how can we enhance this skill? How can we hone this skill? How can we polish our reading skills? There are no standard rules to do so, and always remember it is individual-centric. But there are certain widely accepted steps that we can take to enhance our ability to read more in less time, derive sense out of it and get the intended meaning of the text. And that comes to you gradually, slowly, with a lot of extensive reading, when you do.

And this is a skill that you have to inculcate gradually; it does not come in a flash, it is not, we do not have any golden rule, five golden rules to improve your skills, these are all misnomer expressions, they do not mean anything. As a user of the language, as the reader, you have to inculcate these values and skills, and they come to you with lots of practice and repetition.

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The slide is titled "Developing Reading Skills" and lists the following skills:

- Pre-reading
- While-reading
- Post-reading
- Skimming
- Scanning
- Deductions

The slide is part of an IIT Madras Online Degree presentation, as indicated by the logo in the top right corner. A presenter is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide frame.

So, we will talk about certain things that you need to keep in mind. For example, while developing skills, reading skills, there is something called pre-reading activities. So, what do you mean by pre-reading activities? Being oriented towards the text. So, when I am going to read a text, I need to orient myself, as a reader, towards the text.

So, when you look at the text, and as I mentioned earlier also, your background knowledge, your experience, they do play a huge role in orienting yourself towards the text; it is a guesswork. So, while pre-reading, you anticipate the content, you guess the content, you become familiar with the content. And once you are oriented and once you are ready to read, then we had certain things to follow out while reading the text. And what is that while reading exercises or while reading activities?

'While reading' activities are like taking mental notes, connecting the dots, making notes on a piece of paper, underlining important facts. Usually, these days, with the digital platforms, we are forgetting the habit of reading physical books and texts. But it is very important to read the text in their physical form, in the printed form, because you can do a lot of 'while reading' activities when you read the text in its physical form, like highlighting the important themes, issues, topics, concentrating on the content words.

But in the content words or keywords, every text has certain keywords, certain content words, and these words define the intended meaning of the text. These words encode the intended meaning of the text. So, if you want to understand the text, you need to understand a lot of keywords there in the text. And also, the context of their usages, how they have been used, in what context. Because words or the text will have meaning in a context, so, you have to understand the context in which these words are being used.

So, these are 'while reading' exercises where you take notes, you anticipate, you take a mental note of content words, you join the dots in the thought process, and you anticipate what comes next. And the accuracy of anticipating what comes next accelerates your speed of reading, not only your speed of reading but also it develops a framework of understanding the text, deriving sense out of it, and you will be able to relate to your own experiences and background knowledge. So, it adds to your experience and background knowledge.

Then, post-reading. So, pre-reading, then you approach the text while reading, you do all these activities, then post-reading, you have assimilation. So, you have your background knowledge with which you approach the text. With that orientation, you noted down, jotted down, and you collected a lot of information to it. Now, you have to synchronize that information in chronological order, and we do a lot of follow up, we question, we try to have specific

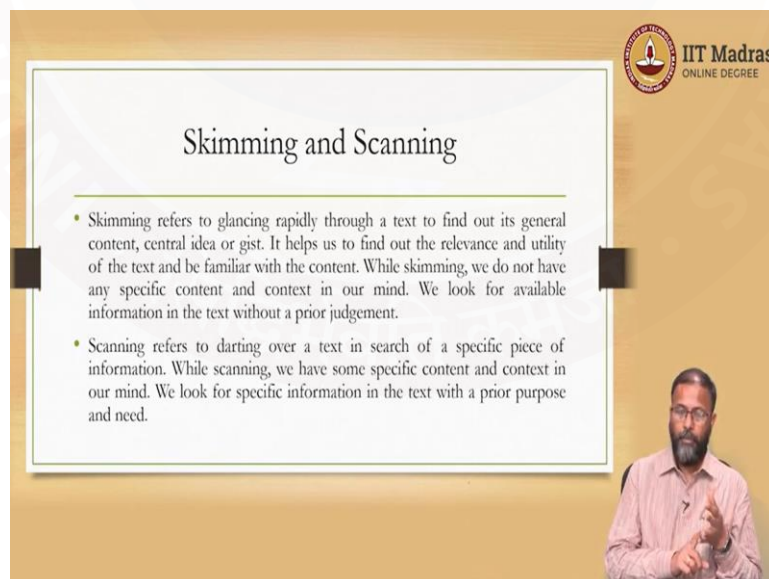
information, we approach the text again, we go to the text, certain parts we need to re-read. So, we do a lot of post-reading exercises.

There is a very common term used in reading that is called skimming. Another term used is called scanning. So, skimming and scanning are two approaches with which we get a text; we get to the text, we approach a text. When we say 'skimming', you might be familiar with, let us say, skimmed milk; you might have seen a milk booth, they sell skimmed milk; what do you mean by skimmed milk? What do they do with the milk when they say 'skimmed' milk,

When they say skimmed milk, that means fat-free, they have skimmed the butter out of it, so the essence has been taken out, skimming of the milk. Churn and skim and get the essence out. We do the same thing with a text. And then, you must be familiar with the word 'scan', especially in the medical field; when you go for any test, you have a CT scan for that matter. What does it mean, CT scan?

So, a particular part of the body is scanned, not the entire body; a particular part of the body is scanned. And how it happens? When the doctor recommends. And the entire procedure is carried out with specific information and specific purpose, scanning.

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The slide is titled "Skimming and Scanning" and is part of an IIT Madras Online Degree presentation. It contains two bullet points defining the terms. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a male lecturer with a beard and glasses, wearing a light pink shirt, gesturing with his hands while speaking.

Skimming and Scanning

- Skimming refers to glancing rapidly through a text to find out its general content, central idea or gist. It helps us to find out the relevance and utility of the text and be familiar with the content. While skimming, we do not have any specific content and context in our mind. We look for available information in the text without a prior judgement.
- Scanning refers to darting over a text in search of a specific piece of information. While scanning, we have some specific content and context in our mind. We look for specific information in the text with a prior purpose and need.

So, let us look at these two approaches. While reading a text, what do you mean by skimming, and what do you mean by scanning? So, while reading, skimming refers to glancing rapidly

through a text to find out its general content, its central idea or just off the text. That means you are not carrying any specific need for any specific information. So, you are approaching the text with an open mind, without any specific need in mind, and you try to look at the essence of the text, what is there in the text. And all available information you note down, you get.

So, it helps us to find out the relevance and the utility of the text and be familiar with the content. You do not have any specific thing in mind. So, you approach a text with an open mind; you have no clue what is there in the text, but while reading and going through the text, you happen to find a lot of important information, and you skim those information out of it. So, it is a very neutral and common practice. So, we look for available information in the text without any prior judgement about the text; this is skimming.

When we say scanning of a text, so when you do scanning, scanning refers to darting over the text in search of a specific piece of information. So, suppose I was watching a match, a cricket match last night, it was in, let us say, some part of Europe or Australia. I was watching a cricket match; I fell asleep, I did not know the score. So, in the morning, when I get the newspaper, I do not go through every page of the newspaper because I know I can find the sports news in the Sports newspaper.

So, I rush to that page without flipping through the rest of the pages, I straight go to the page, and on that particular page, you have many news items about different sports. But I look for the cricket news. And in that cricket news, I look for the scoreboard, and then I see the result, the score and the result. So, I had some specific need to approach the newspaper and get the news or the information about a match that happened last night, and now the result is published in the paper.

So, scanning refers, what did I do? I scanned the newspaper, and I darted over the particular news; I got the information from there, so I scanned it. Scanning a text refers to darting over a text in search of a specific piece of information. So, while scanning, we have some specific content and context in our mind, and we look for specific information in the text with a prior purpose and need. So, we can have two approaches, skimming and scanning.

So, when the text is unfamiliar or when you are not particularly looking for a particular information, we flip through the pages, we read the pages, and we take mental notes, we

understand the text, and we get all important information out of the text. So, we do skimming. But if I have a certain particular idea and I want to find details of it, then I approach a text, and I look for the specific information, and I ignore rest of the information there. So, I am looking for, searching for a particular information and that is called scanning.

So, coming back to again, the steps, pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. And the approaches, the two approaches, skimming and scanning. Always remember, as I told you in the beginning, reading is a well-crafted skill acquired with conscious effort in a formal setting, unlike listening and speaking. See, when we are normal human child, we all have access to language; language grows in us like an organism.

So, we are programmed to learn a language, to acquire a language, we all acquire our mother-tongue, first language. And in that acquisition process, listening and speaking, two skills, they are natural. Reading and writing are well-crafted skills, and they are learnt in the supervision of adults. The young child learns the process, the skill of reading and writing. So, here you have to make little effort to be good in reading, to be good in writing because reading and writing skills are acquired with a structured set of instructions, careful and cautious effort and a lot of practice, unlike listening and speaking. So, you have to be very clear about it.

So, when we talk about first language acquisition, we mean the natural process of acquisition. But reading and writing are learnt. So, there, language acquisition, here language learning. And as I told you, the script is at the centre of these two skills because when you say text, we mean something printed. And when we say something printed, we mean orthographic, symbolic representation of these sounds. So, you have to be familiar with a wide range of vocabulary; you have to be familiar with the context of these words when they are used.

Always remember, when you learn a new word, you do not learn simply the spelling of the word, or you do not learn simply the pronunciation of the word. A word has three components, so when we read a word, it has three components: number one, the structure. So, the spelling system, how it is written, pronunciation. Structure, then the second component of a word is meaning, what it means. It has a certain codified meaning associated with it, encoded in it.

So, you learn a word in terms of phonological structure or orthographical spelling. Then, we learn the meaning. And the third aspect is the context in which it is used. So, when reading a

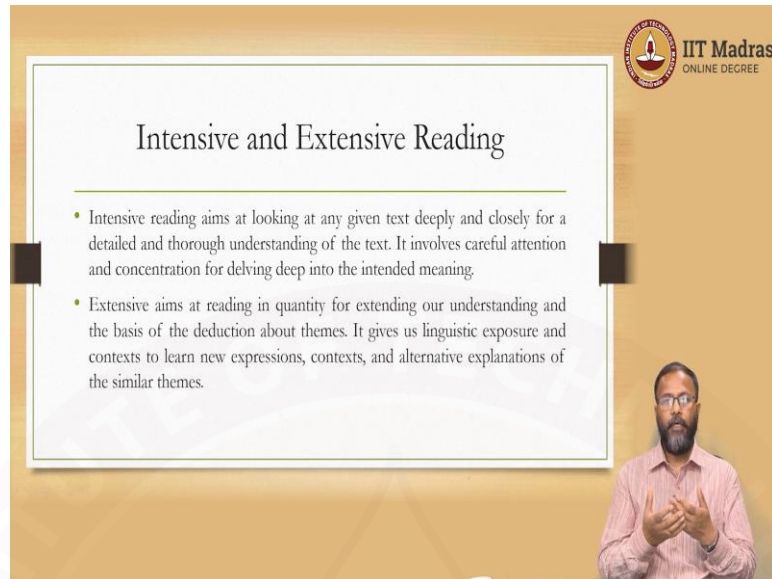
text, we need to be familiar with all the three aspects of every word that you come across. Sometimes, you may find new words or unknown, unfamiliar words while reading; of course, while reading, you find, or you come across a lot of non-familiar and unknown words. In that case, you require to get help from a dictionary and thesaurus, and they give you two things; spelling and meaning.

But the meaning is literal but you have to understand the context in which it is used. So, suppose, there is a sentence like, usually in the north, in Hindi, a woman who is very gentle, noble, well-behaved, well-mannered, soft-spoken, good, in quotes, they say "gaay", because the cow is symbolized as a very innocent animal. This is derogatory, but that is a metaphor that we use in Hindi.

Now, you need to understand the cultural context of this use. You cannot go by the literal meaning of it because it does not make any sense; it is derogatory, it is very derogatory to compare a woman with a cow, it is very derogatory. But you need to understand the cultural context in which it is used, then only you can derive meaning out of it. So, the text alone will not give you meaning; the word alone will not give you the meaning. You need to understand the cultural context of understanding the meaning of a text. And that is why I said that your background knowledge and your experience is at play when you read a text.

Similarly, there are hundreds of expressions in English that are idiomatic. So, idiomatic expressions, metaphorical expressions, neck of a bottle, now the neck is plus animate idea but we say 'neck of a bottle'. Leg of a table, so the leg is a plus animate idea; it is an animate idea. Leg, but we say leg of a table. So, you need to understand the contextual use of it. So, you learn a word in terms of spelling or structure, be it phonological structure or be it orthographic structure. Then the meaning of the word and then context in which it is being used. So, that helps you understand a text.

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Intensive and Extensive Reading

- Intensive reading aims at looking at any given text deeply and closely for a detailed and thorough understanding of the text. It involves careful attention and concentration for delving deep into the intended meaning.
- Extensive aims at reading in quantity for extending our understanding and the basis of the deduction about themes. It gives us linguistic exposure and contexts to learn new expressions, contexts, and alternative explanations of the similar themes.

There are two types of reading; intensive reading and extensive reading. As you understand the word, intensive is vertical in nature, that means we are delving deep into the text. So, you are deriving a deeper meaning of the text. So, a very close meaning of the text. So, the size of the text may be very small, but the meaning may be very profound. And you find intensive reading in poetry, for that matter. You can see the size of the text, very small, but you have such profound and deep meaning. So, intensive reading aims at looking at any given text deeply and closely for a detailed and thorough understanding of the text.

So, you are interpreting the text; you are reading the text very closely, you are able to find the meaning between the lines, what is being said in the sentence and what is being referred to in the sentence; you derive both. That is intensive reading when you read deeply, closely and carefully. So, it involves very careful attention and concentration for developing, for delving deep into the intended meaning encoded by the writer.

So, you have a lot of referential meanings associated with it. A text within the text. So, you read the text, and within that text, you derive a lot of meaning from complex meaning structure because text within the text means it draws heavily from your understanding, cultural understanding, contextual understanding and the referential information available in the text. So, intensive reading is a deep reading which brings out a very deeper meaning, a very profound meaning out of a text.

Whereas extensive reading refers to the size and the spread of your reading. So, on a singular theme, you can have a wide reading, a lot of reading from different perspectives, and we do that. To develop your own opinion and idea about a certain theme, you need to have a lot of reference readings. We do a lot of reference reading, so you do something in the class and then go back to the library, you go back to places, and you find different sources, different materials on the same theme and you expand the base of your understanding and that becomes a solid basis of your deductions that you make at the end of the text, reading the text or understanding of the text.

So, as you can see, that reading requires a lot of conscious effort, a lot of attempt at your part to be a good reader. There is no golden rule; you might have come across a lot of claims where people say, five golden rules or ten golden rules to develop reading skills, nothing. It is all about practice; it is all about intensive and extensive reading. So, you have to develop this skill through your engagement, continuous and sustained engagement with the text. And it requires time to inculcate this skill; it requires time to polish your reading skills.

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Selecting Texts

- Biographies
- Travelogues
- Novels
- Fictions
- Non-Fictions
- Memoirs
- Social History
- Political History
- Philosophy
- Sci-fi Texts
- Technology
- Adventure

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So, then what you have to do? You have to develop your interest in reading, continuous, sustained reading of the text. Now, when we say, what text should we select? It is perfectly a choice. No recommendations; it is perfectly a choice; apart from your syllabus or curriculum that you are engaged with, you can refer to a well-selected text, it may be related to your curriculum,

or it may be related to your interests and hobbies. So, find a text according to your interest. Do not go by someone prescribes a particular text; you may not find interest into that.

So, you select a text. And there are a wide range of texts available for you. If you are interested to read biographies, get some good biographies of some good personalities in the world. Some people may be interested in travelogues. So, people write travelogues and adventure exploration stories, so you go for travelogue, read some travelogue. Lots of good novels in English are available; you can have classics, you can have contemporary writing.

So, you can choose any novel or any author, but you should not stop at one or two texts, continue reading any text of your choice. The point is your consistent and continued sustained engagement with the text. What kind of text? Perfectly your choice. You can go for some non-fiction and issues; some memoirs, people, have written a lot of memoirs. If you are interested, you can read social history of different societies, political history of the world.

If you are interested into profound, deeper, analytical writings, go for philosophical readings, you can have books in philosophy, sci-fi text if you are into science and technology and if you are interested in such writings, you can go for sci-fi texts, sci-fi novels, they are available. You can also read essays and articles in technology and advancement, development, adventure stories; what I am trying to tell you that I am not recommending any particular text. But in order to develop your reading skills, you need to be engaged with the text continuously, consistently and it has to be sustaining for a period of time.

And then, have these notes, making mental notes, anticipating what to come, your own opinion about the text, deriving meaning out of the text, intensive reading, close reading of the text, extensive reading, relating to the text, relating to the theme of the text, understanding the context, understanding the background of the text.

So, all these things together, over a period of time, with sustained effort, will only deliver result. There is no shortcut, and there is no golden rule. So, I believe that you all engage with the text of your choice, and that is why I said, I said, no recommendation. You select a text, a good text. A good text is all about a good piece of writing. So, you will be exposed to a good version of the language. And when I say good, I am not judgmental about the text; what I am trying to say is a standard text which is widely read.

You can develop your own style of writing and speaking later on, but reading works as an input to your writing. If you have good reading habit and skills, your writing will also improve dramatically, because reading will give you a lot of expressions, reading will give you a lot of utterances, new expressions, new ideas, new words, new ways to interpret, new ways to express and it will have a bearing upon your writing skill as well. Because listening, speaking, reading and writing, these four integrated skills - listening acts as a very profound input for speaking.

Similarly, reading also is a very productive and good input for your writing. So, with these, I believe that you all engage with a text of your choice, you develop this habit, you inculcate this habit of reading a standard good text, and you take some time out to read beyond your curriculum and syllabi and engage with the text for longer period of time to explore new expressions, new utterances, new sentences and new ways of representing ideas. Thank you very much.

