



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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**English – I (Basic English)**  
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**Reading**

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## **WHAT IS A TAIL?**

From  
**SWAMI AND FRIENDS**



Welcome to the class. Today, we are going to look at a few passages to practice reading. We are working on developing our capacity for reading. We are working on learning English from developing reading. For this purpose, we are going to look at a few passages from a short piece of a story from one of the chapters in Swami and Friends, the chapter is, what is a Tail?

We are going to look at its few passages, and then we are going to work on some activities to see what we learn from these passages and how these activities help us build our language. One more time I would like to underline that the process is cognitive, the process is underlying our subconscious brain in reading a passage, reading a short piece help us build several other aspects of language that which together yield in developing confidence and building language in us that we use in a very effective and impressive way.

It builds a lot of things without us knowing about them; that is what is known as a subconscious process. So, let us go ahead and look at some of these passages and see what we underline for you to learn out of them.

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## READ ALOUD IN SLOW TEMPO

THE Geography Master was absent, and the boys of the First-A had leisure between three and three-forty-five on Wednesday. Somehow Swaminathan had missed his friends and found himself alone. He wandered along the corridor of the infant standards. To Swaminathan, who did not really stand over four feet, the children of the infant standards seemed ridiculously tiny. He felt vastly superior and old. He was filled with contempt when he saw them dabbling in wet clay, trying to shape models. It seemed such a meaningless thing to do at school! Why, they could as well do those things resembling elephants, mangoes, and whatnots, in the backyards of their houses. Why did they come all the way to a school to do this sort of thing?



Let us read this passage aloud a couple of times, freeze it on your screen and read it aloud, slow, a couple of times for yourself particularly when you are in the process of learning the language. Please pay attention to every part of it, everything in it, allow yourself to pause after reading this short passage that is the purpose of using short passages, let your imagination go in this story and learn about the context as well as the structure of this passage. So, here we go.

The Geography master was absent, and the boys of the first-A had leisure between three and three-forty-five on Wednesday. Somehow Swaminathan had missed his friends and found himself alone. He wandered along the corridor of the infant standards. To Swaminathan who did not really stand over four feet, the children of this infant standard seemed ridiculously tiny.

He felt vastly superior and old. He was filled with contempt when he saw them dabbling in the wet clay, trying to shape models. It seemed such a meaningless thing to do at a school, why? They could as well do those things resembling elephants, mangoes and whatnots in the backyard of their houses. Why did they come all the way to a school to do this sort of thing? Look at this, look at again a part of the psychological development of a child and kinds of things it underlines you to learn apart from learning English and the structure of language.

Let me read it one more time for you, and then you can read it, read this passage couple of times for yourself. The Geography master was absent, and the boys of the first-A had leisure between

three and three-forty-five on Wednesday. Somehow Swaminathan had missed his friends and found himself alone. He wandered along the corridor of the infant standard. To Swaminathan who did not really stand over four feet, the children of the infant standard seemed ridiculously tiny.

He felt vastly superior and old. He was filled with contempt when he saw them dabbling in wet clay, trying to shape models. It seemed such a meaningless thing to do at school! Why, they could as well do those things resembling elephants, mangoes and whatnots in the backyard of their houses. Why did they come all the way to a school to do this sort of thing?

Rajam is not more than four feet tall himself, but he, when he looks at tiny kids, he feels superior, and he feels older. He looks at the activities of tiny kids and wonders about several things. He got this opportunity to watch these kids because he had leisure; he had a break because the geography teacher did not come.

And he had 45 minutes break, he was missing his friends, and in order to kill time, he was walking in the school, and he got a chance to watch things that he would have probably done himself as a child, watch the development, phases and see how kids develop the feeling of growing older.

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### ACTIVITY - 1



1. Identify the words of past tense from the above passage. For example - missed
2. Find a replacement for the following words in the context of the passage.  
leisure, wandered, vastly, and sort
3. What are the root words in the following examples?  
- ridiculously clay  
- resembling whatnots



## READ ALOUD IN SLOW TEMPO

THE Geography Master was absent, and the boys of the First-A had leisure between three and three-forty-five on Wednesday. Somehow Swaminathan had missed his friends and found himself alone. He wandered along the corridor of the infant standards. To Swaminathan, who did not really stand over four feet, the children of the infant standards seemed ridiculously tiny. He felt vastly superior and old. He was filled with contempt when he saw them dabbling in wet clay, trying to shape models. It seemed such a meaningless thing to do at school! Why, they could as well do those things resembling elephants, mangoes, and whatnots, in the backyards of their houses. Why did they come all the way to a school to do this sort of thing?



And then it helps you learn several other parts of language as the following. Can you identify the words of past tense from the above passage? When you pause this and read it a couple of times, try to underline the past tense words in this passage. For example, when you see the word, words, like missed, go back to the passage and see, are there words here that are of similar types of ending.

So, for example, you see that word here. So, try to make, try to make a list of these words, these types of words for yourself. Find a replacement for the following words in the context of the passage. In this passage, you find words like leisure, wandered, vastly and short. What do these words mean, what do these words mean to you?

They are used in this context and try to find a replacement for these words here. What are the root words see that in words like ridiculously, resembling. So, that way, you will get to learn how these things are added to words. You would be motivated enough to look at, think about several other words which will take these endings at the end of them.

And when you pay attention to these nuances in the language that helps you build the underlying, build the capacity that is underlying in us. Allow yourself to do those things, allow yourself to pay attention to these things and watch how these things help develop the capacity of language in you and makes you an impressive speaker.

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4. State whether the given statements are true or false.
- Dabbling means dipping hand in water.
  - Swaminathan felt happy when he saw the kids playing with water.
5. Identify a word in the passage which can be replaced with 'etcetera'.
6. Identify words in the passage which is made by joining two words (somehow, whatnots).
1. What is the height of Swaminathan?
2. Why was Swaminathan feeling superior and old?



Look at these things, are these things true or not true? Look at these questions, Swaminathan felt happy when he saw the kids playing with water. Did he, did he not? Not just find out whether they are true statements or false given the context of the story but also try to understand why was he happy or not happy. What was he doing? Why was he looking at the kids?

Do you look at kids and feel the same way? What do you feel? Do you observe your own development? Do you observe things that you like before you may not like now, things that you may have done before you may not be doing those things now? Is it possible that things that you are doing now probably you will not do after a few years? Do these developments take place only in children, or do we observe changes as grown-up adults do?

Build this for yourself, and you will see yourself using the language and constructing sentences for developing subconscious knowledge. You can identify a word in the passage that can be replaced with 'etcetera'. You know we use this word 'etcetera' all the time. Does this passage have a word which you can, which can be replaced with this one?

You can identify words in the passage, which is made by joining two words like somehow. What we mean here is probably there are two words here, some and how, one and two, whatnots, one-two. So, see if you can find more words that can be combined together. How tall is Swaminathan? Did you notice? Why was Swaminathan feeling superior and old when he saw little kids?



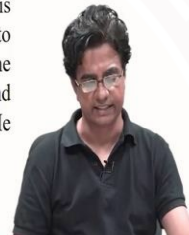
The answers to these questions one more time I will underline help you build the capacity of language, and in addition to that, your efforts in reading this passage or passages like these will also help you develop language.

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#### READ ALOUD IN SLOW TEMPO

Schools were meant for more serious things like Geography, Arithmetic, Bible, and English. In one room he found all the children engaged in repeating simultaneously the first two letters of the Tamil alphabet. He covered his ears and wondered how the teacher was able to stand it. He passed on. In another room he found an ill-clad, noisy crowd of children. The noise that they made, sitting on their benches and swinging their legs, got on his nerves. He wrinkled his brow and twisted his mouth in the hope of making the teacher feel his resentment but unfortunately the teacher was sitting with his back to Swaminathan. He paused at the foot of the staircase leading to the senior classes the second and the third forms. He wanted to go up and inspect those classes which he eagerly looked forward to joining. He took two or three steps up, and changed his mind.



Let us read another passage and see what else we learn from here and what else we can do to learn more from language. Schools were meant for serious things like Geography, Arithmetic, Bible and English. In one room he found all the children engaged in repeating simultaneously the first two letters of the Tamil alphabet. He covered his ears and wondered how the teacher was able to stand it.

He passed on. In another room, he found an ill-clad, noisy crowd of children. The noise that they made sitting on their benches and swinging their legs got on his nerves. He wrinkled his brow and twisted his mouth in the hope of making the teacher feel his resentment, but unfortunately, the teacher was sitting with his back to Swaminathan.

He paused at the foot of the staircase leading to the senior classes and second and third forms. He wanted to go up and inspect those classes which he eagerly looked forward to joining. He took two or three steps up and changed his mind. One more time, I can only say these passages are full of learning; these passages will make you pause and think about a lot of things. But before that read this passage one more time. I will read it one more time for you, you read it a couple of times for yourself, aloud and slow these are the keywords.

Schools were meant for more serious things like Geography, Arithmetic, Bible and English. In one room he found all the children engaged in repeating simultaneously first two letters of the Tamil alphabet. He covered his ears and wondered how the teacher was able to stand it. He passed on. In another room, he found an ill-clad, noisy crowd of children.

The noise that they made sitting on their benches and swinging their legs got on his nerves. He wrinkled his brow and twisted his mouth in the hope of making the teacher feel his resentment, but unfortunately, the teacher was sitting with his back to Swaminathan. He paused at the foot of the staircase leading to the senior classes the second and the third forms.

He wanted to go up and inspect those classes which he eagerly looked forward joining. He took two or three steps up and changed his mind. So, first, you pause and think about this passage and try to understand. Even if you read this passage in isolation, you are going to make a complete story out of this passage for yourself.

The story out of this passage is, there is a child who is walking in the school, looking at certain classes. First, he looks at younger classes and then he found certain things that he does not like, that are not interesting enough for him. He gets disgusted, he keeps wandering and so much so that he even feels sympathetic to teachers and feels how they are able to stand it.

And then he becomes angry and so on. Then he feels like walking up to higher classes, the classes that he is looking forward to joining. But he does not go there; he does not; he stops after going a couple of steps up, changes his mind and comes back. One more time it is good enough piece to make a story for yourself, for you to think about several things, several questions, to let you sit down and reflect on your own school time, to your own development and then build, learn to build context and story for yourself out of this passage.

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## ACTIVITY 2



1. What does the phrase 'passed on' mean?
2. Can you recall more words like ill-clad (two different words joining together)?
3. Can you replace the phrase 'got on his nerves' with one word?
4. Find the meaning of the word 'resentment' in the dictionary.
5. Mark the words or phrases in the passage which shows Swaminathan's anger.
6. Does the phrase 'foot of the staircase' mean that the stairs have foot? Impossible, right. If so, what is the meaning?



Here are some of the things that we can learn. What does the phrase 'passed on' mean? This is used in the passage. Do you know a word like ill-clad, do you use this word? Read this question and try to answer this question for yourself. What is the meaning of 'got on his nerves'? Can you use one word for this? Find the meaning of the word resentment in the dictionary; you can be more creative, you can find an antonym, you can find more words which means resentment and do a lot of things which will stay with you.

The keyword is, you do not need to memorize these things, we do not build a language in us by memorizing things, rather language gets built in, language develops based on these activities, based on these processes that we do a little and it works to a great extent in our subconscious. Mark the words or phrases in the passage which shows Swaminathan's anger.

Do you know, did you know those words? You will ask a question to yourself when you underline these words in the passage. Does the phrase foot on the staircase mean that stairs have a foot? What does it mean? Find it out and see what this does to you.

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## READ ALOUD IN SLOW TEMPO

The Head Master might be up there, he always handled those classes. The teachers too were formidable, not to speak of the boys themselves, who were snobs and bullies. He heard the creak of sandals far off and recognised the footsteps of the Head Master. He did not want to be caught there—that would mean a lot of unsatisfactory explanations. It was with pleasant surprise that he stumbled into his own set, which he had thought was not at school. Except Rajam and Mani all the rest were there. Under the huge tamarind tree they were playing some game. Swaminathan joined them with a low, ecstatic cry. The response disappointed him. They turned their faces to him with a faint smile, and returned to their game. What surprised Swaminathan most was that even the genial Somu was grim. Something seemed to be wrong somewhere.



We can look at one more passage and see how this works and what we get to learn from here. The headmaster might be up there; he always handled those classes. The teachers too were formidable, not to speak of the boys themselves, who were snobs and bullies. He heard the creak of sandals far off and recognized the footsteps of the headmaster.

He did not want to be caught there, that would mean a lot of unsatisfactory explanations. It was with pleasant surprise that he stumbled into his own set, which he had thought was not at school. Except Rajam and Mani all the rest were there. Under the huge tamarind tree, they were playing some game. Swaminathan joined them with a low, ecstatic cry. The response disappointed him; they turned their faces to him with a faint smile and returned to their game.

What surprised Swaminathan most was that even the genial Somu was grim. Something seemed to be wrong somewhere. Read it again. These passages are in continuation; they will help you connect things with each other. But as I mentioned even if you read them independent of one another, they help you build a story for yourself; they help you understand children, they help you understand growing children, they help you understand the activities in their mind, the process of their thought, the patterns of their language, the patterns of their thought as well, so read about it.

The headmaster might be up there; he always handled those classes. This is the reason why Swaminathan did not go up, or there could be more reasons for that, let me read it one more time

for you. The headmaster might be up there; he always handled those classes. The teachers too were formidable, not to speak of the boys themselves, who were snobs and bullies.

He heard the creak of sandals far off and recognized the footsteps of the headmaster. He did not want to be caught there, that would mean a lot of unsatisfactory explanations. It was with pleasant surprise that he stumbled into his own set, which he had thought was not at school. Except Rajam and Mani all the rest were there. Under the huge tamarind tree, they were playing some game.

Swaminathan joined them with a low, ecstatic cry. The response disappointed him; they turned their faces to him with a faint smile and returned to their game. What surprised Swaminathan most was that even the genial Somu was grim. Something seemed to be wrong somewhere. This was the conclusion that Swaminathan would have drawn.

What happened? What is going on in this passage? I have led you to explain a couple of passages before that I want you to explain this passage to yourself after you have read this passage aloud a couple of times for yourself. And what you will, where we want your attention to are the following, is the following.

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### ACTIVITY 3



1. Identify the words that represent sound in the passage.
2. What is the meaning of the phrase, 'far off'?
3. Find the antonym of the words  
snobs, bullies, stumbled, formidable
4. In the context of the passage, replace the word 'faint' used in the sentence, 'they turned their faces to him with a faint smile, and returned to their game.'
5. In the context of the passage, can we derive that genial is the opposite of grim?
6. The meaning of the word 'ecstatic' is the feeling of happiness. But in the passage, you see that it is written as ecstatic cry. Why?



So, we want you to identify words that represent sound in the passage. What is the meaning of the phrase 'far off'? You can find antonyms of these words. Snobs, bullies, stumbled, formidable.

In the context of this passage, replace the word 'faint' used in the sentence, 'they turned their faces to him with a faint smile and returned to their game', this is a sentence in the passage. So, what we are asking you to do is replace this word 'faint' with something.

In the context of the passage, can we derive that genial is the opposite of grim? The meaning of the word 'ecstatic' is the feeling of happiness, but in the passage, we see it used as ecstatic cry. Explain why? And this will take you to the next level; you would have learnt a lot that is hard to assess for yourself at this time, that is the power of reading, that is what reading does to you when you use this approach to learn the language. Good luck. See you again. Thank you.

