

The Art of Effective Reading

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- understand the importance of reading in achieving success both in academic and professional life
- acquire the various types of reading skills that one may employ while reading different kinds of texts
- learn the four basic steps in the process of reading
- get to know the basic hurdles in efficient reading and the tips to overcome them
- know the relation between speed reading and success and also learn the ways to increase your reading speed

Resolve to edge in a little reading every day, if it is but a single sentence. If you gain fifteen minutes a day, it will make itself felt at the end of the year.

-Horace Mann (1796–1859)

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man— Francis Bacon, the famous essayist, has rightly observed in his well-known essay ‘Of Studies’. It is true that of all the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—reading is probably the most crucial skill. It is so because a good reader can rise above the disadvantage of limited opportunity received in terms of listening, speaking, and writing a language. By all means, effective reading skills are vital to achieving success not only in one’s academic but also professional life. Usually, it is observed that only good readers are good communicators. It is a skill that cannot be ignored. It is advisable to acquire efficient reading skills as early as possible.

17.2 NEED FOR DEVELOPING EFFICIENT READING SKILLS

You definitely know how to read. But the question is whether you know how to read skilfully and artfully. Skilful reading is reading for specific information for a better learning experience in a short span of time. It is an art which can be learnt easily by using a systematic approach and by undergoing formal training. This chapter will help you learn this art. You will surely be able to know how to

use diverse ways so that you can enhance your effectiveness and make your future reading experience more rewarding and enriching.

Have you ever noticed that we do not approach a novel, or a report, or a personal letter, or an email in a similar manner? In fact, the truth is that while reading, you employ different reading speeds and different approaches to them. However, it is also true that different people have varied speeds of reading and understanding. So, as a student, who has to read much for academic pursuance, and as a future professional, there is a dire need to learn the skills and techniques of artful reading. Before we talk about these techniques and types, let us know the major benefits that you may achieve by developing the art of efficient and artful reading.

17.3 BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE READING

Here are the benefits of effective reading:

1. Effective reading can provide you with a ‘comprehensible input’ from the book or document that you read.
2. It can enhance your general ability to use other language skills such as listening, speaking, and writing.
3. It can enhance your vocabulary, that is, you can always learn new words, phrases, and expressions.
4. Effective reading also helps you keep your mind focused on the material and prevents it from unnecessary distractions.
5. Moreover, this enables you to extract useful information much more efficiently within a limited time.
6. It can help you consolidate both previously learned language and knowledge.
7. It helps in building confidence as you start reading longer, and later, voluminous texts.
8. It gives you pleasure and relaxation as books are the best and most reliable friends.
9. Effective reading facilitates the development of various other skills, such as making predictions, comparing and contrasting facts, creating samples, hypothesizing, reorganizing the message as transmitted by the text, improving your critical thinking, and hence developing a sharp acumen with passage of time.

17.4 SPEED OF READING

An average college student reads between 150 and 250 words per minute. A ‘good’ reading speed is around 250 to 400 words per minute, but some people can read even 1000 words per minute or more. However, research shows that there is difference in the rate of reading for different purposes (Table 17.1).

Table 17.1 Rates of Reading

Purpose of Reading	No. of Words (words per minute/wpm)
• Reading for memorization	• Fewer than 100
• Reading for learning	• 100–200
• Reading for comprehension	• 200–400
• Skimming	• 400–700

Understanding the role of speed in the reading process is essential. Research shows that a close relation can be observed between reading speed and understanding. Proper reading training can help you increase both your rate of reading and comprehension. It is a vital fact about reading that plodding, which means reading word by word, reduces understanding rather than increasing it.

Actually, most adults are able to increase their reading rate significantly and rather rapidly without lowering their comprehension. Merely reading more rapidly, without actual improvement in the basic reading habits, however, usually results in lowered comprehension. Broadly categorized, there are three main factors involved in improving reading speed:

- The desire to improve
- Conscious efforts in using newly acquired techniques
- A motivation to practise

With these, almost anyone can double his/her speed of reading while maintaining equal or even better comprehension.

Table 17.2 gives the differences between an efficient and inefficient reader.

Table 17.2 Differences Between Efficient and Inefficient Readers

An Efficient Reader	An Inefficient Reader
• Always reads for ideas or information	• Tries to read words
• Reads group of words/multi-phrases	• Reads word by word
• Quickly adjusts his/her speed of reading to the nature of the text	• Reads the text from the beginning till the end
• Sets the purpose of reading right in the beginning	• Reads everything and deliberately goes slow while reading
• Reads smoothly	• Reads the information again and again to figure out a clear understanding of the text
• Visualizes ideas	• Vocalizes or sub-vocalizes words while reading
• Has a good vocabulary in that subject	• Has limited vocabulary which hampers his/her speed and understanding
• Continuously keeps improving his/her pace of reading	• Rarely attempts speed reading
• Properly tries to sort out the material as critical, interesting, analytical, etc.	• Reads everything indiscriminately

17.5 FOUR BASIC STEPS TO EFFECTIVE READING

While reading a text to learn something, you need to follow the following four basic steps:

1. *Figure out the purpose of reading a particular text.* You can identify suitable reading strategies and use your background knowledge of the topic in order to anticipate the contents.

2. *Spot the parts of the text relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest.* This selectivity enables you to focus on particular elements of information from the text. So, you are able to sift through the information, which in turn reduces the amount of information you have to hold in short-term memory.
3. *Choose the appropriate reading strategy that suits your purpose.* Select the strategy that is suited to the reading task in that particular context and use that strategy in an interactive manner. This will develop your understanding as well as confidence.
4. *Test or assess your comprehension during reading and also when the reading task is completed.* Monitoring comprehension helps you make out the inconsistencies and discrepancies in total comprehension of the text. At this step, you can also learn to use alternative strategies.

17.7 TYPES

Now, for learning the art of reading, you should know the four basic types of reading skills that a reader may use in any language. These types will be discussed in this section.

17.7.1 Skimming

Skimming is used to quickly gather the most important information or ‘gist’ from the document or novel that you read. For this, you should make your eyes run over the text, noting important information. You may also go through the contents of the chapters rapidly, picking out and understanding the key words and concepts. For example, while reading the newspaper in the morning, you quickly try to get the general news of the day and discover which articles you would like to read in more detail.

17.7.2 Scanning

Scanning is used to find a particular piece of information. In this type of reading, you allow your eyes to run over the text, looking for the specific piece of information that you need. You use scanning when you go through your schedule or meeting plans, look for specific advertisements, or some specific information in a book, etc. This is the most effective way of getting information from magazines—scan the table of contents or indexes and turn directly to interesting articles to arrive at the specific information.

17.7.3 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is used to obtain a general understanding of a subject. It includes reading of the longer texts for pleasure, and business reports to know about the general trends. In this type of reading, you should not worry if you do not understand each and every word. You can use this type of reading to improve your general knowledge of business procedures, or to know the latest marketing strategy. Also, while you read a novel before going to bed, or magazine articles that interest you, you use your extensive reading skills.

Reading Comprehension

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- understand why reading comprehension is a necessary skill
- figure out how effective your reading comprehension abilities are at present
- pick up the different reading skills employed in dealing with varied reading comprehension tasks
- make out the nature, structure, and tone of a given passage
- learn how to identify the central idea in a passage
- appreciate the function of connectives in passages
- apply the various skills required in understanding a passage and answering the questions

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most commonly assessed skills in many a reputed test meant to select people for further studies or professional positions. In the recent past, in fact, reading comprehension has emerged as one of the most authentic tools to judge a person's suitability for a job or further studies, and it now forms an important part of the preparation on the part of a youngster who intends to attain success in the academic and professional world. It is, however, paradoxical that just as we are beginning to emphasize more on the reading comprehension skills, reading itself, as a skill, has taken a beating in recent times. Lack of reading habits, emanating mainly due to a young mind's overt obsession with technology-driven devices such as the computer, mobile phone, and television, makes it all the more difficult for a large number of students to combat reading comprehension passages which occur almost inevitably in most competitive exams now. That is why, though many brilliant minds around us do very well in other parts of their test, they struggle to answer the questions based on the reading comprehension passages.

Passage 1

What distinguishes humans from animals? For some it is language, for others it is the altruistic willingness to help other members of the species. However, this kind of altruism seems to exist in the animal world as well.

Researchers working with Crisophe Boesch at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig observed that West African chimpanzees adopt orphaned young, even though they are not related to them. Several animals lavished care on a juvenile for several years. Surprisingly, half of these adoptive parents were male.

This behaviour is thought to be encouraged by the pressure of leopards, with whom the West African chimpanzees share their habitat. The constant threat from the big cats seems to have encouraged cohesion and solidarity within the group. Accordingly, the scientists observed more chimpanzee adoptions in West Africa's Tai National Park than in East Africa.

Wild chimpanzees appear to be more prepared to help than those living in captivity. In zoos, chimpanzees cooperate with other members of the group to only a very limited extent. 'Our observations show that altruism in wild chimpanzees is much more widespread than studies of chimpanzees in zoos would suggest,' concludes Chrisophe Boesch.

Source: 'The Speaking Tree,' The Times of India, Sunday, 11 July 2010, p. 1.

Answer the following questions by choosing the right options:

1. Which of the following does the author want to establish by suggesting that animals are altruistic?
 - (a) That humans are beginning to behave like animals
 - (b) That animals are beginning to behave like animals
 - (c) That animals too, like humans, share empathy with fellow creatures
 - (d) That humans are not so empathetic to their fellow creatures as animals are
2. While discovering the adoptive streak in animals, what surprises the author is that
 - (a) Even chimpanzees adopt orphan juveniles of big cats
 - (b) Even male chimpanzees adopt juveniles of other species
 - (c) Even big cats adopt orphan juveniles of chimpanzees
 - (d) Even female chimpanzees adopt juveniles of other species
3. About the recently discovered altruistic zeal in chimpanzees, all except the following can be inferred from the passage.
 - (a) Chimpanzees living in the wild are more altruistic than those in cages.
 - (b) Chimpanzees adopt orphans that are even unrelated to them.
 - (c) Chimpanzees found in West African forests are more altruistic than those found anywhere else.
 - (d) Chimpanzees found in the Tai National Park in West Africa are observed to be more altruistic than those found in East Africa.
4. Which of the following is not a reason for the altruistic behaviour observed in West African chimpanzees?
 - (a) The presence of a constant threat from leopards in their environment
 - (b) The presence of a natural altruistic willingness to help others
 - (c) The presence of a natural sense of competition in animals
 - (d) The presence of a natural environment that stimulates such a behaviour in them
5. In the expression 'this behaviour is thought to be encouraged...', the word 'this' refers to which of the following.
 - (a) The presence of a natural environment that stimulates such a behaviour in them
 - (b) The presence of a natural altruistic willingness to help others
 - (c) The presence of a natural sense of competition in animals
 - (d) The presence of a constant threat from leopards in their environment

- (a) That chimpanzees are not much distinguished from humans
- (b) That chimpanzees exhibit a sense of altruism existing in them
- (c) That chimpanzees do not behave as strictly according to their gender as humans do
- (d) That sexual limitations do not stop a male chimpanzee from being altruistic and adoptive in behaviour

Answers with explanation

1. Both (a) and (b) are completely out of tune with the passage; hence ruled out. The author does not compare the extent of empathy exhibited by animals and humans, hence (d) is also not possible. Only (c) sums up the view expressed in the passage; hence the answer.
2. Refer to the last sentence of the second paragraph 'Surprisingly, half of these adoptive parents were male'. Hence, (b).
3. The first sentence of the last paragraph clearly supports (a); the second sentence of the second paragraph establishes (b); option (d) is mentioned towards the end of third paragraph. Therefore, all except (c) can be inferred from the passage. Hence, (c).
4. 'a natural sense of competition', suggested in (c) cannot normally be the reason behind someone's altruism. Hence, (c) is the answer. All the remaining options (a), (b), and (d) can be inferred from the text. Therefore, (c).
5. In the paragraph preceding the statement, the author highlights the sense of altruism found in chimpanzees. Hence, (b).

Passage II

Just as the light sentences awarded in the Bhopal case scandalized the nation, the six-month term given last December to former Haryana police chief, SPS Rathore, for molesting 14-year-old Ruchika Girhotra, provoked an extensive review of the provisions related to sexual offences. In its hastily drafted bill put out for public consultation, the Home Ministry however overlooked the very provision that allowed Rathore to get away with a paltry punishment despite being found guilty of child molestation.

The draft bill failed to address a glaring anomaly in the Indian Penal Code's provisions dealing with sexual assault on under-aged girls. While the rape of a child attracts higher penalty, there is no such distinction when it comes to molestation. Irrespective of the age of the victim, all cases of 'outraging her modesty' (as quaintly put in this provision of Victorian vintage) are punishable under Section 354 IPC with a maximum sentence of two years.

Having left untouched the provision relating to molestation, the home ministry aggravated the anomaly, however unwittingly, by proposing to enhance the punishment under Section 509 IPC for eve-teasing or 'act intended to insult the modesty of a woman', from one year to seven years.

Thus, Chidambaram's ministry ended up sending out a perplexing message to sexual offenders. If they indulge in eve-teasing, they could be put behind bars for as long as seven years. But if they actually molest a woman or a girl, they will not get more than a two-year term. Such a cavalier approach to legislation shows that it is more about politics than about justice.

This is also borne out by the government's prolonged indifference to another gender issue: its international treaty obligation to enact a law on sexual harassment at work places. Though India ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) way back in 1993, the government came out with a draft bill only this year.

In between, the Supreme Court sought to fill the gap with a set of directions in the landmark Vishaka judgement of 1997. It is a commentary on its patriarchal society, that despite having a bloated statute book, India does not have legislation on sexual harassment at work places.

Source: 'Fair Play Denied,' The Times of India: The Crest Edition, Saturday, 10 July 2010, p. 7.

Answer the following questions by choosing the right options for each of them:

1. The anomaly mentioned in the passage refers to the fact that
 - (a) Though there are provisions to punish a rapist, there is no law against molestation.
 - (b) There is no difference in the punishment to be awarded to a molester and a rapist.
 - (c) There is no difference in the punishment for the rape of a girl and the molestation of a woman.
 - (d) There is no difference in the punishment for molesting girl or a woman.
2. By remarking that the draft bill is *more about politics than about justice*, the author intends to suggest that
 - (a) The government is more keen on gaining a political advantage by hastily proposing the Bill, than ensuring justice to the victims.
 - (b) The government is playing politics by keeping the issue of molestation alive in the media.
 - (c) The government is politically motivated to subdue the opposition by proposing the bill in a hurry.
 - (d) The government has all the time to play politics but no time to secure justice for the masses.
3. The word 'cavalier' as used in the passage means all of the following except
 - (a) Haughty
 - (b) Rash
 - (c) Prudent
 - (d) Frenetic
4. The tone of the passage is
 - (a) Approbating
 - (b) Disparaging
 - (c) Eulogizing
 - (d) Captious
5. With which of the following propositions is the author more likely to agree to?
 - (a) That the difference in the punishment for rape and molestation be eliminated
 - (b) That the difference in the punishment for the molestation of a minor and a major be clearly defined
 - (c) That the difference in the punishment for sexual harassment and molestation be equated
 - (d) That the victims of molestation and sexual harassment at work places be given adequate compensations

Answers with explanation

1. Refer to the second paragraph. The author clearly emphasizes '...the age of the victim...'. It is this 'glaring anomaly' that the author criticizes in the passage. Hence (d).
2. The entire passage in general, and the third paragraph in particular, suggests that the draft bill has been hastily put up without taking care of the inconsistencies and anomalies, to salvage a political image. Hence (a). The remaining options are either exaggerated or unrelated.
3. Refer to the last sentence of the fourth paragraph. The author obviously finds the step taken by the government to be rash, hasty, and panicky. So, all except 'prudent' (c) can be the adjectives chosen to describe the word 'cavalier' as used in the context. Hence, (c).
4. The author does not appreciate, applaud, or praise the draft bill proposed by the government. Therefore, both 'approbating' and 'eulogizing' can be ruled out. Further, though the passage criticizes the draft bill, he/she does not 'disparage' or insult it, hence, only (d) appropriately suggests the tone adopted in the passage.
5. Throughout the passage, the author has contested the provision that does not take into consideration the age of the victim of molestation. Therefore, he is most likely to agree to (b).

Passage III

Perched languidly near the Konark coast in a state of decrepit grandeur, the Sun Temple may just be sitting atop its own grave. Seemingly on the precipice of extinction after a tenacious battle with the elements, the temple—built in the 13th century as a colossal chariot for the sun god and representative of the pinnacle of ancient Kalinga art—has now presented a great, albeit troubling, riddle before the world's top archaeology experts.

At the heart of a very intricate and equally delicate problem are the sand-filled walls of the Jagmohan, or the front audience hall, that survived the temple's gradual decimation. And as the clock ticks away, the answers, worryingly, haven't come.

Over a hundred years old, faced with the threat of the edifice caving in, experts stuffed the Jagmohan's walls with sand to conserve it. Now, with cracks and damage to the temple apparent even to the naked eye, global archaeology circles are witnessing a raging debate whether or not to extract the sand. If the sand is permitted to remain inside the 130 feet-high Jagmohan, experts fear the structure will suffer irrevocable loss. If it is not, it could disintegrate. Caught in this maze of ifs and buts—and with decay spreading each passing day—archaeologists, conservationists, engineers, scientists, historians, government officials, and other stakeholders are desperately seeking enlightenment. So far, there's been none.

In March this year, over 50 experts from India and abroad converged in Konark to forge a consensus on future conservation strategies for the temple, which was given World Heritage Site status by the Unesco in 1984. They talked, discussed, debated, argued and did everything except arrive at a solution. The range of opinions on offer varied from the scientific to the unscientific, the real to the absurd. Some favoured getting rid of the sand; others opposed it. Some suggested supporting the temple with steel rods. Others felt it was too risky. At the end of it, there was no consensus. And no solution.

Source: Sandeep Mishra, 'Sunset Temple,' *The Times of India: The Crest Edition*,

Saturday, 10 July 2010, p. 9.

Answer the following questions by choosing the right options:

1. 'The Jagmohan' in the passage refers to
 - (a) The front hall for the audience in the Sun Temple
 - (b) The highest wall in the Sun Temple
 - (c) The idol kept in the Sun Temple
 - (d) The maze in the Sun Temple
2. The Sun Temple in Konark was given the status of world heritage site by the

(a) UNICEF	(b) OTDC	(c) UGC	(d) UNESCO
------------	----------	---------	------------
3. With the walls of the Jagmohan caving in, the main debate is about
 - (a) Whether or not to extract the sand stuffed into the walls
 - (b) Whether or not to renovate the walls of the hall
 - (c) Whether or not to use steel rods to stabilize the walls
 - (d) Whether or not to demolish and restructure the walls
4. By writing that '...the Sun Temple in Konark may be sitting atop its grave', the author wants to suggest that
 - (a) The temple was built in the 13th century.
 - (b) The temple is in a dilapidated condition.
 - (c) The temple has suffered an irrevocable loss in the recent past.
 - (d) The temple is built on graves.
5. In the expression, 'so far there has been none', the word 'none' in the passage refers to the fact that

- (a) Though there have been scientists, archaeologists, engineers, and historians, there is no political leader to help save the Sun Temple.
- (b) Though the temple authorities are seeking government aid desperately, no such aid has come their way.
- (c) Though experts from many different walks of life are worried about the decrepit state of the temple, no one is able to find a solution to it.
- (d) Though experts such as archeologists, engineers, scientists, and historians are worried about the Jagmohan, they are not bothered about the Sun Temple on the whole.

Answers with explanation

1. Refer to the first sentence of the second paragraph; the correct option is (a).
2. Refer to the first sentence of the fourth paragraph; the correct option is (d).
3. Refer to the second sentence of the third paragraph. Clearly, the 'raging debate' is about 'whether or not to extract the sand.' Therefore, (a).
4. Before using this phrase, the author refers to the 'decrepit grandeur' of the temple. Hence, (b).
5. Refer to the discussion towards the end of the third paragraph. The author clearly highlights that though experts from different walks of life have been trying, no solution is in sight. Hence, (c) can be safely concluded from the passage.