

How can you learn a language through reading?

There is very good research showing that it is possible to learn a lot of a language through reading. If you want to use **reading as a way of developing language proficiency**, what should you do?

Reading at the right level

Read texts which are at the right level for you. In English there are many books, called graded readers, which are specially written within a controlled vocabulary for learners of English. At almost every level of proficiency learners can read books which are at the right level for them. So, for example, a learner who knows only 400 words can read several books at level 1 of the series.

Many graded reader series end at around 3,000 words. If you know more words than this, you should read the Mid-frequency readers which are written at the 4000, 6,000, and 8,000 word levels.

Make sure you do plenty of reading. The higher your level of proficiency, the more you will need to read in order to meet words at the right level for you enough times to have a chance to learn them.

Reading helps language learning by providing the important learning condition of repetition. That is, through reading learners meet words, word groups and grammatical constructions several times and so have a good chance of learning them.

Extensive reading

Extensive reading involves doing large quantities of reading using material which is at the right level for you. Ideally, this reading should be enjoyable. Material which is at the right level contains no more than two unfamiliar words in every 100 running words (about 1 unknown word or less in every five lines). For elementary and intermediate learners, this means reading books written within a controlled vocabulary (graded readers).

The aim should be to read a book a week, spending at least an hour or two per week reading. In a well-balanced language course, just under a quarter of the course time should be spent on extensive reading. Two thirds of this time should be spent reading material containing a few unknown words, and one third of this time should be spent quickly reading very easy material in order to develop reading fluency.

The research on extensive reading has shown that it brings about improvement in reading, vocabulary growth and a wide range of language skills and knowledge.

Re-reading books

When you have read a long text, is it better to re-read the same book or read a different one?

The advantages of re-reading a book are

- 1 it will be a lot easier than reading it the first time
- 2 it will guarantee repetition of the vocabulary
- 3 it will provide an opportunity for recall of previously met vocabulary to occur
- 4 it may help develop reading fluency
- 5 it will take much less time than reading a different book of the same length.

The advantages of reading a different book are

- 1 some of the words met in the previous book will be met again in varied meetings
- 2 there will be many new words to learn.

These lists suggest that re-reading is a good idea, and that it would be good to have a mixture of re-reading and different reading in a language learning program.

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