



How to improve students' reading skills

- Ensure reading is a **regular and focused part of lessons** throughout the course. Short reading tasks can be used as starters, for example, or as a regular part of topic-based teaching. Use published materials that relate to the exam (e.g. textbook audios, practice papers), but also **accessible material** from other sources (e.g. internet based slow news – although this is usually audio, there are sometimes transcripts available. Authentic news reports or interesting articles online can also be adapted and/or abridged for use in the classroom).
- **Model approaches to questions and answers** when practising reading comprehensions – rather than just telling students to read and answer the questions, talk them through the question, how it could be approached, how they can prepare themselves for what they are about to read. Displaying the question on the board or using a visualiser and making your own notes helps provide a clear, visual demonstration of this. For example:

Today we are going to be completing this reading question about the environment. Prior to reading the text/questions, we may be starting to think of all the vocabulary related to environment that we know in order to prepare our brains for what we are likely to read. We read the question carefully and highlight that it asks "What is he doing to help the environment now?" – this means that, although we may see references to actions he has taken in the past or is planning to take in the future, these will not lead us to the correct answer. We are therefore reading for present tenses (I recycle, I sort, I buy, for example) and ignoring any negative references (e.g. I don't recycle/buy). As I read the text, I'm going to highlight the environmental actions I read that relate to the present tense and then fill in my answer once I have read the whole of the text.

- Ensure students are **familiar with a range of words that may be distractors** in the reading – common ones include negative forms, words such as but, however, whereas, without, except. The vocabulary on the syllabus will give specific examples that can be used.
- Look at **previous reading exam papers** and practise vocabulary that regularly appears – including numbers, times and time phrases, for example. Vocabulary can be reviewed regularly in lessons as part of starter activities (match up target language with English, finding synonyms such as 1 week = 7 days, picking out key information from a text, etc.). Ensure students can match time phrases that may be expressed in more than one way (e.g. a period of time expressed as dates that equates to a fortnight, language discrepancies in the target language vs English, such as French, where a fortnight = 15 days).
- **Practise synonyms** – done through modelling reading style activities or practice tasks where students match vocabulary-based synonyms. For lesson starters/tasks give students a topic/title and they have to list all vocabulary associated with it (e.g. employment – students write job types, places of work, time frames associated with work, opinions, etc.) – this also helps consolidate and build vocabulary knowledge
- Provide students with **a variety of reading based texts**, linked to what is required in the exam – e.g. questions in target language, texts from a range of different sources and contexts (e.g. factual authentic texts, signs and notices, emails and letters). As far as possible, make sure practice tasks mirror the types of questions that are likely to feature in the exam to help build familiarity with question types. The syllabus provides details of specific question types that appear in the exam.
- If the language has any **patterns in spelling** which may help students to decode the meaning into English, highlight these. It is helpful to highlight where comprehension mistakes could be made or where there might be misconceptions.
- **Develop student confidence** with reading – if you are using a text that is likely to be more challenging because of unknown vocabulary (such as an authentic text), provide a glossary of some of the key terms. Break tasks down so that students are not attempting too much at once in the practice stage.
- Encourage **annotation of the text** when completing reading questions, rather than going straight for an answer to the question. Reinforce the time constraints imposed by the exam when taking this approach.
- **Explain why answers are right or wrong** – rather than just presenting them with the correct responses, highlight why some are incorrect.
- **'Spot the mistakes'**. Provide students with two texts (the texts could both be in target language or one in target language and one in English) with differences in the information provided. Students have to identify where the differences are (this could cover specific vocabulary items such as numbers, topic-based vocabulary or more general words such as connectives, negatives, etc.). 'Tangled translation' is another similar activity – students are given two texts, one in target language and one translated into English. Both texts have information missing (but not the same information – if a section is missing in the target language version, it is present in the English

version), so students identify what is missing in the target language text and translate and vice versa with the English text. This practises translation both from and into the target language and encourages consideration to be given to the different structures of the target language.

- Emphasise that the students can **use other clues** to support them in reaching the correct answer – e.g. visuals, time phrases.
- **Usefulness of cognates** and ‘false friends’ – words in target language that look like English but mean something different (e.g. *attendre* in French meaning to wait (for) in English, rather than attend, *carpeta* in Spanish means folder, not carpet).
- Present **working by elimination** as a useful skill for reading – e.g. in multiple choice style questions, students tick options as they read before deciding on a final answer.

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