

# EFFECTIVE ENGLISH LEARNING

## Unit 4: Reading



### PROCESSES

As we said in the Listening unit, the processes of reading comprehension and listening comprehension have a lot in common, although when trying to understand another language we may be more aware of difficulties with one than the other. The two language learning principles that we discussed in that unit - **Let context help you** and **Learn to live with uncertainty** – are also relevant to reading.

#### Task 4.1

Read the extract below and then choose the best summary from the four suggestions underneath it.

*Reading... can be seen as the processing of information. The reader brings to the text his own store of general information deriving from his native culture, education, personal experience and, normally, some specific knowledge of the topic of the written text. We very rarely pick up a text dealing with a subject we know*

*nothing about. At the same time, the reader also possesses a linguistic competence including a knowledge of words (lexis), of how these words are deployed according to the linguistic system in order to form sentences (syntax) and of the rhetorical patterns and linguistic conventions which characterize different types of text.*

*Furthermore, in an ideal situation, the reader approaches a text with genuine motivation to read and a reading purpose. He may pick up a telephone book to find the number of a friend, or a textbook to prepare for an examination, or a novel to read for pleasure. Whatever the text, he will also have some expectations or predictions regarding its content, based both on graphic cues (headline, photographs, tables, etc.) and on his knowledge of the subject matter, and regarding how the text is likely to be organized. As he reads, these predictions are confirmed (or not confirmed) by the text. The better the predictions, the faster the processing of the text, since the mind is 'prepared' for the information encountered and thus perceives meaning more readily.*

(Haarman, Leech and Murray 1988: vii)

Which of these is the best summary of that extract?

- (a) What really matters in reading is your motivation and purpose in reading
- (b) Reading a text effectively is helped by thinking about it first
- (c) You should not read a text on a topic you know nothing about
- (d) Use your predictions, the language and text structure as you read

Click [here](#) to see the answer suggested in the Feedback section

In this unit we will be paying particular attention to the **text** element in reading and seeing how the reader's knowledge of **language** (lexis, syntax and conventions) enables us to understand what the writer means. But it important not to forget the role played by the reader's use of **strategies**.

## Reading strategies

Two strategies that are frequently discussed and recommended in reading courses are **skimming** and **scanning**. In **skimming** we survey a text quickly to get a general idea of its content. This is useful, for example, in a situation where you are not sure that a text covers the topic you want to read about, or where you want to give yourself an overview of the text before reading in more detail.

In other situations, you may know that a text contains the specific facts that you need, so you search only for that information; this is known as **scanning**. Scanning may involve looking within a very limited area of the text, such as when consulting an encyclopedia or dictionary, or through several sections of the text, as in the case of a search for a technical term or reference that you know a writer has used in a particular article.

### Task 4.2

Other terms for **skimming** or **scanning** are given below. Which ones refer to which?

- sampling
- search-reading
- surveying
- focused reading

Check your solution [here](#)

In the case of second language reading, it is even more important to read **strategically**, i.e. to match your style of reading to your current purpose. Later in this unit, we will be looking at the use of effective strategies when dealing with an academic text.

The international students we have taught at Edinburgh often mention two main difficulties in doing the required reading for their academic programme: **lack of vocabulary** and **low reading speed**. Let's consider those two problems.

## Unfamiliar vocabulary

Not all new words are obstacles. It is usually possible to work out the meaning of a text without needing to use a dictionary.

So, as we saw in the Listening unit, it makes sense (in order to save time and effort) to use your background knowledge and context to work out the meanings of unfamiliar expressions. It is better to try first to get the **approximate meaning** of a new word or expression, rather than consulting a dictionary, which will slow you down.

But, in some situations, the context and your subject knowledge are not enough to enable you to work out certain meanings. In this case, you can apply **Language Learning Principle 7**:

### Use your linguistic knowledge

We are going to look at two types of linguistic knowledge: knowledge of **words** (e.g. how they are formed and what they mean) and knowledge of **text structure** (the ways in which whole texts are built up by the writer).

#### Linguistic knowledge (1): Words

Not all the “new” vocabulary we encounter when reading will be completely new to us. It may involve words, or parts of words, that are already familiar. We have examples of that in the task below.

##### Task 4.3

What do you think the six expressions below mean? Write in your guess by each one.

*a flycatcher*

*to disambiguate*

*cack-handed*

*ladies' fingers*

*the fat police*

*pedestrianised*

Which of those did you find most difficult to guess at, and why?

For Feedback, click [here](#)

For some students, of the six expressions in Task 4.3, it is *cack-handed* that causes them most difficulty. Of course, we gave you all the expressions in that list **out of context**, which makes guessing harder. In real life we usually meet new vocabulary in context, and this often helps us to understand the meaning.

#### Task 4.4

Have a look at the text below and check whether your guess at **cack-handed** was correct or close:

*The figures show that by 2006 the funding for English universities will have risen by 18% in real terms compared with 2002. That increase will be three times the rise in funds enjoyed by their Scottish rivals. That funding gap can only increase after 2006, when universities in England can start to charge their undergraduates up to £3,000 a year in tuition fees... This leaves Scottish higher education at a disadvantage, and it is hard to see how we can avoid negative effects, such as a brain-drain of staff to universities in England. **Cack-handed** attempts to hide the funding gap only reinforce the belief that Scottish ministers know there is a problem and have no solution to it.*

(adapted from *Scotland on Sunday*, 29 February 2004)

Click [here](#) for Feedback.

### Linguistic knowledge (2): Text structure

As well as knowing thousands of English words, you have accumulated experience of different **types of English text**: books, articles, reports, manuals, pamphlets, letters, etc. The technical term for these text types is **genres**.

Your experience of genres means you now have certain expectations of the probable content and structure of reading material in a particular genre. For example, in the case of academic books, you can predict that certain elements will be present, and

probably in the following order:

- title page
- publishing details
- ISBN
- preface and/or introduction
- acknowledgments
- contents page
- chapters
- references
- glossary
- index

#### Task 4.5

What are the elements you expect to find in an academic **journal article**? Write them down as a list, in the order you expect to find them.

Compare your answers [here](#)

## Reading speed

The other main reading problem our students talk about is that they feel they read too slowly. Although it is possible to buy textbooks that train faster reading (some are mentioned later under *Resources*), applying one or two basic principles may be enough to increase your reading speed.

The first is **not to speak the words aloud** as you read them. Many of us do this quietly as we read a text in a foreign language that we don't know well (and even in our first language, if we find the content of a sentence hard to understand); this is known as *sub-vocalisation*.

Researchers have shown that sub-vocalisation slows down your reading: it takes approximately 0.25 of a second to recognise a letter and to assign the appropriate sound (Nunan 1991). At that rate, readers would only be able to process about 60 words of English a minute. The average native reader can read and understand up to 300 words a minute. So sub-vocalising will make you a slower reader. If you know you normally sound the words as you read them, it is worth making a conscious effort not to do that.

The second and perhaps more practically helpful approach to reading fast is to read less for the same effect, that is, **to read more economically and efficiently**.

We saw in Task 4.5 that it is possible to predict the order in which the various likely elements of an academic text will occur. For example, if you want to find out quickly what a writer's overall position or conclusion is, you can read just the **abstract** or jump straight to the **conclusion** and skim the final paragraphs. Having understood what points the author makes in the conclusion, you may decide you do need to understand the argument in detail; in that case, you can then have a look at the main body of the text - but not necessarily all of it. This will make your reading *economical*.

The next two Tasks will give you practice this sort of economical reading with a short academic article.

#### Task 4.6

At the end of this unit you will find an academic article, entitled 'Learner/non-teacher interactions: the contribution of a course assistant to English for Academic Purposes speaking classes'. It was written for teachers of English as a foreign language.

Before you look at the article, what do you think about having a classroom assistant who has **no teaching experience**? What are possible advantages or disadvantages?

When you have thought about the pros and cons, do Task 4.7

#### Task 4.7

Now read ONLY THE CONCLUSION of the article (shown in **bold**, or blue).

Click [here](#) to read the Conclusion

Are the authors in favour of having a course assistant or are they against the idea?

Click [here](#) for Feedback

Let's now pause, for a moment, and think about the reading processes involved in the previous task.

In Task 4.7 we tried deliberately to limit your reading purpose. We asked you only to decide YES or NO (for or against). To make that decision, it was enough to have read only the conclusion. There, the **positive** words (*appreciable, opportunities, value, most important, extended the social dynamics, and appreciated*) should have given you sufficient evidence to choose the correct answer, YES.

However, even when you are reading with a broader purpose, you may **not need to read every word** in a text to find the information you need, as the next task will show.

#### Task 4.8

You have now discovered that Lynch and Anderson found evidence in favour of using a course assistant, even though she was relatively young (younger than the international students doing the English course) and had no experience of language teaching.

But what was their evidence?

This time, read the whole text, but in the following way:

1. Read the **first paragraph** (the Introduction)
2. Read the **first sentence** or the **heading** of the other paragraphs
3. Read the concluding paragraph

What are the authors' arguments for their conclusion?

For Feedback, click [here](#)



What you did in Task 4.8 is known as **attacking a text** - using it selectively, reading only the parts that are likely to contain the key information, and grasping the writers' point without reading every word.

This approach has been found helpful by many students, both native and non-native readers of English. It was the basis for a well-tested method of teaching reading efficiency known as **SQRRR**, which we mentioned in the unit on Listening. The initials stand for the five stages of reading considered to make text processing more effective:

- **Survey** (sample or skim the text, use abstracts, beginnings of paragraphs, conclusion)
- **Question** (ask yourself what answers you think the text will give you)
- **Read** (go back and read in enough detail to get those answers)
- **Recall** (put the text to one side and try to remember its main points)
- **Review** (ask yourself how sure you are that you have gained enough from the text)

Adopting or adapting the SQRRR approach should help you to find the **overall idea** of the text and the **thread of argument**.

Even if you later need to read **intensively for further detail**, skimming the whole text first is a good way to save effort; it helps you to get an overview and guides more detailed reading. It will also enable you to realise when a text does not contain relevant material for your purpose. That will save you wasting your time unnecessarily.

Finally, don't forget that many British students, too, feel that they read too slowly, under the time pressure of an academic course. Here is an extract from a study skills guide written for UK students:

*You cannot afford just to read at whatever speed comes 'naturally'. If you are trying to keep abreast of a course of study, you often have to push yourself to do a lot more reading than you would achieve at a 'natural' rate. However,*

*there is a wide range of reading speeds, from a lightning skim through a whole book to the intensive study of a difficult paragraph. You need to become accustomed to working at different points on that scale depending on the circumstances. How fast you should go will depend on:*

- *what you already know about the subject you are studying*
- *how difficult the text is*
- *how thoroughly you need to understand it*

*As a very rough rule-of-thumb you might want to think in these terms:*

- **easy** text; fairly familiar material **100+** words per minute
- **moderately hard** text, which you want to follow reasonably closely **70** words per minute
- **difficult** text; unfamiliar subject matter which you want to understand in depth **40** words per minute

(Northedge 1990: 34-5)

#### **Task 4.9**

Those reading speed figures were recommendations for native readers. Do you think they are a reasonable target for you to aim at yourself?

Compare your answer with ours [here](#) in Feedback

#### **Task 4.10**

Do you know your own reading speed in English? As an experiment, [click here](#) to find a short article on Faster Reading. Time yourself reading it and then work out your approximate speed. The text contains 1,360 words.

How close did you get to the 70 words per minute (moderately hard text) mentioned by Northedge?

There are many speed reading assessments online. One can be found at [ReadingSoft.com](https://www.readingsoft.com)

## RESOURCES

### Newspapers

Reading newspapers – and reading internet news reports - is one of the most popular forms of independent English practice among the international students on our pre-sessional EAP programme. Can you think how you might use newspaper reading to improve your knowledge of grammar?

### Adverts

Advertisements are everywhere: in newspapers and magazines, on walls, on TV, radio and the net. As reading or listening practice material, their advantage is that they are short and concise, and often tell a complete 'story'.

Adverts are written in ways that make them memorable, and this can sometimes involve quite difficult language. In some cases, they are intended to be puzzling at first, to attract the reader's attention and to encourage you to make an effort to understand the message.

If, having tried to work out what an advert means, you cannot make proper sense of it, then ask a native speaker. Sometimes what makes an advert difficult to understand is the background knowledge. By way of illustration, have a look at the advert below and then look at Task 4.11:

*This will be a rare sight  
on St. Patrick's Day.  
(It's full.)*



*PURE GENIUS  
ON MARCH 17th*

**Task 4.11**

- What is the product being advertised?
- Can you explain what 'This' and 'It' refer to?
- Why will 'This' be a rare sight?
- What is St. Patrick's Day?
- What is the meaning of the symbol next to 'PURE GENIUS'?

For answers, click [here](#)

**Task 4.12**

- Find an advert in a newspaper (or on the Net) which you don't understand, or only partly understand. Ask someone else whether they can explain it to you.

## Journal articles

In Tasks 4.7 and 4.8 we saw how the generic structure of journal articles can help you to understand them. But as well as using them as sources of **information**, you can explore them as sources of useful **academic English**, too. For example, in the Conclusion to our 'course assistant' article, you will find a number of expressions used to highlight the *process of concluding*.

### Task 4.13

Study the Conclusion (page 25) and underline the expressions you think are typical of the final part of an article - which you can use yourself in your writing. (We think there are six).

Check your selection with ours [here](#)

You can use the readings for your programme as a source of both subject knowledge and academic English. Some ways of recognising which new words are likely to be useful to you in your studies are:

- if the writer has **highlighted** them (bold, underlined, italic)
- if they are **defined** in the text
- if they deal with concepts that are **new to you**
- if they occur **frequently**
- if they are featured in the **index** or glossary
- if the writer has indicated they are **important** (*main, central, key, etc.*)

## Some faster reading courses

Buzan T. 1971. *Speed Reading*. London: David and Charles

Mosback G. and Mosback V. 1977. *Practical Faster Reading*. Cambridge University Press.

Northedge A. 1992. *The Good Study Guide*. Open University. (Chapter 2).

Wallace M. 2006. *Study Skills in English*. 2nd edition. Cambridge University Press. (Ch 2).

If you want more practice in effective reading, there are plenty of useful activities at <http://www.uefap.com/reading/readfram.htm>

## ADVICE FROM OTHER STUDENTS

Finally, some comments from five University of Edinburgh students on techniques that they have found helpful in improving their reading. Consider how they might be relevant to your own current needs in reading English.

1. I try not to look up words in the dictionary. Only if it is absolutely necessary to understand the meaning of the phrase and I don't know a word at all and I can't get the meaning from context, I look the word up. Otherwise I force myself to get the meaning only from the context. If the word/phrase turns up more often in a text I write it down in a small book.
2. My reading was not fast enough. I used to take a long time to read a few sentences in a paragraph. So I found a book entitled Reading Faster, which contained useful pieces of information, one of which was that I can read faster if I don't pronounce the words. So I tried that method and it was very helpful. Now I read much faster than I used to.
3. I have to read two or three texts every week for my course. I try to read these texts without a dictionary. I use the dictionary only for some words which occur very often and seem to me important. In the beginning I had to read some texts a second time. But now I can understand the content even if I know only perhaps 50% of the vocabulary. So now I do not take so long to read one text and I have time for another.
4. I read the whole text without worrying about comprehension. Then I try to find sections; if they are not clear, I do the same thing on each one. Just after that I try to understand the contents of each one. Sometimes giving myself just a short time to read can help.
5. Normally when I am reading in my subject, I only need to read about 30% of the text to get the meaning. The other 70% I can miss out. But to improve my vocabulary I sometimes force myself to read a whole page and to read every word in the sentence, working out all the words and how they fit together.

### Task 4.14

Look through each student's comments again. Think about how their views fit in with what we have covered in this unit. Where you think there is a connection, make a note of the relevant page or task number. [For Feedback, click here](#)

The comment from the fifth student includes a particularly interesting suggestion: that by “forcing himself” to read in detail, he is able to expand his vocabulary.

He also implies that he reads to improve his knowledge of grammar, since he writes about 'working out all the words and how they fit together'.

That underlines the point we made in Task 4.13: that you can use your academic reading to develop your knowledge of academic language, which will be particularly important when you need to write. We will be picking up this point again in the unit on Writing.

That's the end of this unit, which I hope has helped your thinking about ways of improving your reading skills as a University of Edinburgh student, and beyond...

As usual, if you have found any *errors* in the text, or web links no longer working, or if you would like to suggest other informal learning techniques for this unit, you are welcome to email me at

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## Reading

### Feedback: study notes and answers

#### Task 4.1

We think the best summary is (d). [Click here to go back](#)

#### Task 4.2

*Sampling* or *surveying* = skimming. *Search-reading* or *focused reading* = scanning. [Click here to go back](#)

#### Task 4.3

A *flycatcher* is a species of bird.

*To disambiguate* is to make a meaning clear when a sentence has more than one meaning (in other words, is *ambiguous*). For example, "Flying planes can be dangerous".

*Cack-handed* is discussed further in Task 4.4.

*Ladies' fingers* has at least three different meanings: (1) another name for *okra*, a type of vegetable; (2) a small type of banana; and (3) a sweet biscuit (USA).

*The fat police* is a negative term for health experts (and others) who urge us to eat less fat in our daily diet.

When a street has been made car-free, for pedestrians only, we say it has been *pedestrianised*.

[Click here to go back](#)



#### Task 4.4

*Cack-handed* = clumsy, awkward or, in this text, *unsuccessful*.

Click [here](#) to go back

#### Task 4.5

The typical order of academic papers is:

Title - author's name - author's place of work - abstract - introduction - method - results - discussion - conclusion - acknowledgments - references - appendices.

However, the precise structure varies from one academic field to another.

To go back, click [here](#)

**Task 4.6** is an open question

#### Task 4.7

The authors are in favour of having a classroom assistant.

Click [here](#) to return to the page you were on.

#### Task 4.8

The reasons mentioned in those parts of the text are as follows:

- (1) the CA initiated more topics than the teachers;
- (2) she initiated more talk about language than the two teachers;
- (3) she got the students talking more about their strategy for doing the task. In their questionnaires, the students said they gained as much from talking with the CA as with the teachers in most (four of five) language areas; it was only in

the case of grammar that the students preferred interaction with the class teacher. To return, click [here](#)

### Tasks 4.9 and 4.10

These are open questions, but those reading speeds probably do represent reasonable targets for L2 readers to aim at. The important thing is for us to recognize the need to use different reading speeds, to match our current purpose.

### Task 4.11

The product is the Irish black beer, Guinness, although it is not explicitly named in the advert.

*This* and *It* refer here to the glass of (Guinness) beer; the glass is in fact full, since the white area at the top is not empty space (as some of our students have assumed) but the white 'head' of froth, typical of Guinness.

*St Patrick* is the patron saint of Ireland, whose birthday is celebrated on March 17, when a full glass will be uncommon (since Guinness is so good that you have to start drinking it straight away).

The symbol is an *Irish harp*, the trademark of Guinness; *PURE GENIUS* is an established slogan for Guinness, partly because of the similarity of the words *genius* and *Guinness*.

Task 4.12 is another open question.

### Task 4.13

We have underlined our selected phrases in the text below:

*This case study has attempted to assess the effects on classroom interaction of having a NS course assistant in Speaking classes in a pre-sessional EAP programme. We have seen that that the CA made an appreciable difference to both the amount and the nature of interaction in class. The study has included quantitative analysis of classroom recordings of*

student/teacher and student/CA talk during the Scenario, and qualitative analysis of students' perceptions, expressed in a questionnaire, of their opportunities to interact with the CA. In both cases, the findings point to the value of the additional native speaker.

From the students' point of view, it may be concluded that the most important difference the CA made to classroom interaction was that they were able to find – or take – more opportunities to talk about themselves when working with her than with the teachers. The evidence of our study is that the introduction of the CA has extended the social dynamics of NS/NNS interaction inside the EAP classroom – something that has been appreciated by both learners and teachers.

#### **Task 4.14: Our answers**

- Comment 1 recalls what you did in Tasks 4.3 and 4.4.
- Comment 2 mentions one of the books listed in the Resources section.
- Comment 3 also has links with Tasks 4.3, 4.4.
- Comment 4 also picks up Tasks 4.7 and 4.8.
- Comment 5 has echoes of Task 4.13 and the idea of using your course reading as a resource for your academic language development.

[To return, click here](#)

#### **References in this Unit**

Haarman L., Leech P. and Murray J. 1988. *Reading Skills for the Social Sciences*. Oxford University Press.

Northedge J. 1990. *The Good Study Guide*. Open University

Nunan D. 1991. *Language Teaching Methodology*. New York: Prentice Hall.

## Learner/non-teacher interactions: the contribution of a course assistant to EAP speaking classes

*Tony Lynch and Kenneth Anderson*

### **Introduction**

This is a case study of innovative practice in a pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme. The innovation was the introduction of a non-teacher course assistant to work alongside the class teachers, in order to increase the students' opportunities for interaction with a native speaker. Analysis of classroom recordings from one type of Speaking class and of students' post-course questionnaires suggests that the availability of this additional native speaker led to interactions that were quantitatively and qualitatively different from those between the students and their teachers.

### **Context**

Speaking is one of four main taught strands in the full-time summer EAP programme run by the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Applied Language Studies (IALS). The principal aims of the programme are to raise students' overall English proficiency to the point where they can cope with the linguistic demands of academic study, and to extend their study skills. The programme is divided into three 3-week courses and one 4-week course, as shown in Figure 1:

COURSE	1			2			3			4			
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
WRITING	Academic writing/grammar						Integrated language skills work (listening, reading, note-taking, summary and essay writing) on three topics			Research skills / language practice in classes grouped by subject area Micro-projects; academic writing; extensive reading; videos; lectures; library work; word-processing.			
LISTENING	Lecture listening/note-taking												
READING	Vocabulary and reading												
SPEAKING	Accuracy: Information tasks  Fluency: Scenarios						Seminar presentation skills			Seminar participation skills			
INDIVIDUAL STUDY	Self-access work under tutorial guidance, focusing on language learning strategies and self-assessment; based on Study Room materials / facilities, including micros									Library research project and tutorials			
LECTURES	Two optional weekly lectures (Social and Lecture Programme)												

*Figure 1. IALS summer EAP Programme*

The Speaking strand features materials in three genres of oral communication, requiring attention to

different aspects of successful speaking: *Information Tasks* concentrate on improving the clarity of the spoken message; *Scenarios* focus on the flexibility with which students react in situations where they need to persuade someone to accept their point of view; and *Seminar Skills* work sharpens the effectiveness of students' contributions to academic discussions, either as main speaker or as a member of the audience.

### *The course assistant*

The EAP course assistant (CA) we appointed for summer 1996, who subsequently returned for the next three summers, was a 20-year-old female Scottish undergraduate studying for a modern languages degree. Her contribution to the students' oral skills development took three forms: (1) she participated in each class's Information Task and Scenario lessons; (2) she talked to the students during the class's weekly review; and (3) she was available as a conversation partner during the students' mid-morning break.

We were interested in analysing the possible effects on classroom interaction of bringing in a non-teacher, and in particular in exploring the assumption in the earlier students' feedback suggestion, i.e. that a 'normal' NS would offer not only more practice, but also a different type of communicative experience than would be available with a teacher. To assess the impact of the CA's contribution to the Speaking strand, we decided to concentrate on the *Scenario* classes, since these would allow us to make the most direct comparison of interaction with teacher and non-teacher on the same topic and task.

One way in which we expected the student/CA talk and student/teacher talk in scenario classes to differ was that we thought there would be a greater focus on **language form** by students working with the teacher, because the students would regard the CA as having less authority in that area. We also assumed that there would be more negotiation of meaning – especially more requests for clarification – in interaction with the CA, for two reasons. Firstly, because she would have less experience of native/non-native speaker (NS/NNS) interaction than the teachers and would therefore understand her interlocutors less well. Secondly, because the students were likely to be less accustomed to the CA's Scottish speech patterns than to those of the teachers, who were both English.

### *The study*

Our study involved audio-recording student/teacher and student/CA interactions at Stage 1 of the

scenario (where the two halves of the class prepare for the first public performance). The recordings were made in nine lessons over weeks 1-6 of the 1996 programme: five featured a lower-level class (approximately 450-500 TOEFL) taught by female teacher B, and four a higher-level class (500-550 TOEFL) taught by male teacher C. The 18 students in the two classes came from Bahrain (2), Germany (2), Iran (2), Japan (2), Korea (3), Nepal, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Spain (2), Thailand, and Turkey. Teachers B and C were similar in age and classroom experience (25-30 years, including extended periods in Africa), academic background (PhDs in applied linguistics) and origin/accent (southern English).

### *Classroom recordings*

The audio recordings were transcribed and analysed into *episodes*, defined as a series of speaking turns on the same topic. These episodes were further categorised according to who initiated them: the students or the native speaker (CA, Teacher B or Teacher C). Following Hancock's study of adult EFL learner interaction in role-play classes (Hancock 1997) we adopted the categories of *literal* and *non-literal* frame, derived from Goffman (1974). In our case, students were considered to be speaking in a non-literal frame when either discussing or rehearsing the performance for Stage 2, and to be speaking in a literal frame when referring to or focusing on their lives beyond the classroom task. Talk in a non-literal frame included three main categories: episodes dealing with *General procedure/Task management*; *Input* (on the content or language of the role card); and *Output* (on possible strategies or language to be used at Stage 2, or in rehearsal). Talk in a literal frame was subdivided into 'On-task' and 'Off-task'.

### **Findings**

Our analysis of Stage 1 episodes revealed that the CA was more like Teacher B than Teacher C in terms of her share in initiating episodes - approximately four out of every ten episodes; Teacher C initiated only one in four episodes. In Table 1, Total is the total number of episodes, Mean refers to the mean number of episodes per scenario, and Share is the proportion of episodes initiated by students or NS. The topical episodes involving the CA tended to be shorter (205 episodes in the nine CA recordings, compared with 160 in the nine Teacher recordings).

*Table 1. Initiation of topical episodes (Stage 1)*

	Total	Mean	Share
Ss	115	12.8	56.2%
CA	90	10.0	43.8%

Ss	48	9.6	59.3%
Teacher B	33	6.6	40.7%
-----			
Ss	58	14.5	73.5%
Teacher C	21	5.25	26.5%
-----			
365			

We had expected language-focused talk to be more frequent in interaction with the teachers than the CA, but in fact the CA initiated more talk about language (36.6%) than Teacher C (33.3%) and, particularly, Teacher B (26.3%), as shown in the table below.

**Table 2. Initiation of language-focused episodes**

	Input (text)	Output (task)	Total		NS share
-----					
Ss	11	8	19		
CA	8	3	11	30	36.6%
-----					
Ss	3	11	14		
Teacher B	-	5	5	19	26.3%
-----					
Ss	3	3	6		
Teacher C	3	-	3	9	33.3%
-----					

*Input* episodes were those in which the discussion focused on the role card texts, while *Output* episodes were about the language to be used by the players in Stage 2. The lower number of form-focused episodes with Teacher C could reflect the higher proficiency level of his class, although the difference between the two classes was relatively small. The overall totals for this type of talk with the CA and the teachers are very similar: 30 language-focused episodes with the CA and 28 with the two teachers. However, a difference emerges when we consider who the source of those episodes was. The CA initiated relatively more talk about language (36.6%) than Teacher C (33.3%) and, particularly, Teacher B (26.3%).

A substantial amount of the time in Phase 1 – 137 out of 365 episodes – was spent discussing how to approach the task: what we have called ‘Output: strategy’, to distinguish it from talk about the appropriate linguistic forms to use (‘Output: language’). We found that the CA was more proactive than the two teachers in initiating output-focused episodes, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. *Initiation of strategy-focused episodes*

		Total	Share
Ss	47		63.6%
CA	27	74	36.4%
Ss	23		82.1%
Teacher B	5	28	17.8%
Ss	28		80.0%
Teacher C	7	35	20.0%
		137	

This tendency for the CA to be more proactive in talking about the strategy for the task is reflected in the figures in Table 1, which showed that interaction with the CA featured more and shorter episodes. It may be that she saw it as her responsibility to ensure that her groups completed the Stage 1 planning satisfactorily, and therefore ‘chivvied’ them through their discussion, as in the three-episode example we have just shown. It could also be that she was less tolerant of, or less used to, the thinking time that some L2 learners need in this sort of activity. The teachers seemed more prepared to wait for the students to come up with suggestions for Stage 2.

#### *Questionnaire responses*

The qualitative aspect of our case study draws on the students’ responses to a questionnaire, which provides glimpses of the motives behind patterns of interaction in class. Unfortunately, half the students (9 of 18) did not complete the questionnaire in full, but we believe the comments we did receive are enlightening, particularly in revealing students’ perceptions of the relative merits of interaction with the two types of NS in their Scenario lessons. In brief, analysis of the returns shows that

- Most found their teacher easier to understand than the CA. (item 1)
- Most found it easier, or as easy, to speak the CA. (item 2)
- Most said that the differences they noticed between the teacher and the CA were in terms of accent and speed of speaking. Two thought the CA spoke less accurately. On the other hand, a further two described the CA’s accent as ‘ordinary’ and ‘natural’. (item 3)

In relation to the five areas of linguistic improvement mentioned in item 4, the students reported that interaction with the CA benefited them as much as (or more than) that with the teacher in four: vocabulary, pronunciation, listening and fluency. Only in relation to grammar did they feel that



interaction with the teacher was more helpful. The final questionnaire item, on the general value of the CA to the EAP programme, elicited predominantly positive replies. All but one of the students regarded the innovation as useful, listing the following among their reasons:

- *It helps us to get used to native speakers (3 similar replies)*
- *It practices listening to normal speed English*
- *You don't know exactly what kind of sentence will come next*
- *We gain confidence with someone not so formal as a teacher*

### Implications

Since the introduction of the CA into the summer programme in 1996 we have explored other ways of involving her as an additional native speaker in the scenario lessons, which we summarise below.

#### **Ask the CA to play the scenario with the class teacher**

Videotaping the two NSs doing a scenario in class allows you to replay extracts later, allowing the students to compare their performances with a sample performance by NSs. This enables you to draw attention to patterns of spoken language, which are normally less accessible than those in the written language (Carter and McCarthy 1995). Examples we have found and pointed out to students in our recordings include the CA's use of local expressions such as 'a wee bit', 'Where do you stay?' for 'Where do you live?', and 'Will I...?' for 'Shall I...?' The recordings also highlight some socio-cultural assumptions underlying NS discourse, such as the stereotypical tendency of British people to play down 'problematicity' ('I've got a bit of a problem', 'that would be quite difficult'), and their common softening of a refusal or retort with 'actually'. Video replay makes such characteristics of communication more tangible (cf. Scarcella 1990; Jones 1999).

#### **Use the CA as a partner in pair work**

In summer 1998 we changed Stage 2 of the Scenario procedure: instead of beginning with a public performance by two students, we had all the students play the scenario 'privately', in parallel pairs. With an odd number of students present, the CA worked with the unpartnered student; when numbers were even, she helped the teacher to monitor the students' talk, to deal with requests for language help, and to listen in and comment on the pairs' recordings once they had finished.

### Conclusion

**This case study has attempted to assess the effects on classroom interaction of having a NS course assistant in Speaking classes in a pre-sessional EAP programme. We have seen that that the CA made an appreciable difference to both the amount and the nature of interaction in class. The study has included quantitative analysis of classroom recordings of student/teacher and student/CA talk during the Scenario, and qualitative analysis of students' perceptions, expressed in a questionnaire, of their opportunities to interact with the CA. In both cases, the findings point to the value of the additional native speaker.**

**From the students' point of view, it may be concluded that the most important difference the CA made to classroom interaction was that they were able to find – or take – more opportunities to talk about themselves when working with her than with the teachers. The evidence of our study is that the introduction of the CA has extended the social dynamics of NS/NNS interaction inside the EAP classroom – something that has been appreciated by both learners and teachers.**

Click [here](#) to go back to Task 4.7

## **FASTER READING**

(text length: 1,360 words)

### **Breaking Poor Reading Habits**

If you're like most people, then you probably have one or more reading habits that slow you down. Becoming a better reader means overcoming these bad habits, so that you can clear the way for new, effective ways of reading.

Below, we cover some of the most common bad reading habits, and discuss what you can do to overcome them.

### **Sub-Vocalization**

Sub-vocalization is the habit of pronouncing each word in your head as you read it. Most people do this to some extent or another.

When you sub-vocalize, you "hear" the word being spoken in your mind. This takes much more time than is necessary, because you can understand a word more quickly than you can say it.

To turn off the voice in your head, you have to first acknowledge that it's there (how did you read the first part of this article?), and then you have to practice "not speaking." When you sit down to read, tell yourself that you will not sub-vocalize. You need to practice this until this bad habit is erased. Reading blocks of words also helps, as it's harder to vocalize a block of words. (See below for more on this.)

Eliminating sub-vocalization alone can increase your reading speed by an astounding amount. Otherwise, you're limited to reading at the same pace as talking, which is about 250-350 words per minute. The only way to break through this barrier is to stop saying the words in your head as you read.

### **Reading Word-by-Word**

Not only is it slow to read word-by-word, but when you concentrate on separate words, you often miss the overall concept of what's being said. People who read each word as a distinct unit can understand less than those who read faster by "chunking" words together in blocks. (Think about how your eyes are moving as you read this article. Are you actually reading each word, or are you reading blocks of two, or three, or five words?)

Practice expanding the number of words that you read at a time. You may also find that you can increase the number of words you read in a single fixation by holding the text a little further from your eyes. The more words you can read in each block, the faster you'll read!

### **Inefficient Eye Motion**

Slow readers tend to focus on \_\_\_\_\_ each word, and work their way across

each line. The eye can actually span about 1.5 inches at a time, which, for an average page, encompasses four or five words. Related to this is the fact that most readers don't use their peripheral vision to see words at the ends of each line.

To overcome this, "soften" your gaze when you read – by relaxing your face and expanding your gaze, you'll begin to see blocks of words instead of seeing each word as distinct unit. As you get good at this, your eyes will skip faster and faster across the page.

When you get close to the end of the line, let your peripheral vision take over to see the last set of words. This way you can quickly scan across and down to the next line.

## Regression

Regression is the unnecessary re-reading of material.

Sometimes people get into the habit of skipping back to words they have just read, while, other times, they may jump back a few sentences, just to make sure that they read something right. When you regress like this, you lose the flow and structure of the text, and your overall understanding of the subject can decrease.

Be very conscious of regression, and don't allow yourself to re-read material unless you absolutely have to.

To reduce the number of times your eyes skip back, run a pointer along the line as you read. This could be a finger, or a pen or pencil. Your eyes will follow the tip of your pointer, helping you avoid skipping back. The speed at which you read using this method will largely depend on the speed at which you move the pointer.

## Poor Concentration

If you've tried to read while the TV is on, you'll know how hard it is to concentrate on one word, let alone on many sentences strung together. Reading has to be done in an environment where external distractions are kept to a minimum.

To **improve your concentration** as you read, stop multitasking while reading, and remove any **distractions**. This is particularly important, because when you use the techniques of chunking blocks of words together and ceasing to sub-vocalize, you may find that you read several pages before you realize you haven't understood something properly.

Pay attention to "internal distractions" as well. If you're rehashing a heated discussion, or if you're wondering what to make for dinner, this will also limit your ability to process information.

Sub-vocalization actually forces your brain to attend to what you're reading, and that's why people often say that they can read and watch TV at the same time. To

become an efficient reader, you need to avoid this.

### Approaching Reading Linearly

We're taught to read across and down, taking in every word, sentence, paragraph and page in sequence.

When you do this, though, you pay the same attention to supplementary material as you do to core information. (Often, much more information is presented than you actually need to know.)

Overcome this by scanning the page for headings, and by looking for bullet points and things in bold. There is no rule saying that you have to read a document in the order that the author intended, so scan it quickly, and decide what is necessary and what isn't. Skim over the fluff, and only pay attention to the key material.

As you read, look for the little extras that authors add to make their writing interesting and engaging. If you get the point, there's no need to read the example or anecdote. Similarly, decide what you need to re-read as well. It's far better to read one critical paragraph twice than it is to read another eight paragraphs elaborating on that same concept.

### Keys to Speed Reading Success

Knowing the "how" of speed reading is only the first step. You have to practice it to get good at it. Here are some tips that will help you break poor reading habits and master the speed reading skills discussed above.

- Practice, practice, practice – you have to use your skills on a regular basis. It took you several years to learn to read, and it will take time to improve your reading skills.
- Choose easy material to start with – when you begin speed reading, don't use a challenging textbook. Read something like a novel or travel-writing, which you can understand and enjoy with a quick once-over.
- Speed read appropriately – not everything you read lends itself to speed reading.
- Legal documents, the draft annual report, or even the letter you receive from a loved one in the mail - these are better read in their entirety, sub-vocalizations and all.
- If you need to understand the message completely, memorize the information, discuss it in detail, analyze it thoroughly, or simply enjoy the prose the way the author intended, then speed reading is the wrong approach. (Here, it helps to choose an appropriate **reading strategy** before you start.)
- Use a pointer or other device to help push your reading speed – when you quickly draw a card down the page, or run your finger back and forth, you force your eyes and brain to keep pace.

- Take a step back and use the material's structure – this includes skimming information to get a feel for the organization and layout of the text, looking for bolded words and headings, and looking for the ways in which the author transitions from one topic to the next.
- When you start speed reading, it's wise to benchmark your current reading speed. This way you can tell whether your practice is paying off, and you can impress your friends and family when you tell them that you can now read faster. There are many speed reading assessments online. One such assessment can be found at **ReadingSoft.com**

To return to the unit, click [here](#)