

The ins and outs of teaching reading skills for IELTS

Workshop A5

ETAS PD Day 2022

Presented by

Jayne Kyte Dip.TESOL

Sponsored by CEL GmbH

A quick overview

Academic and General Training

Time: 60 minutes

3 sections: 40 questions

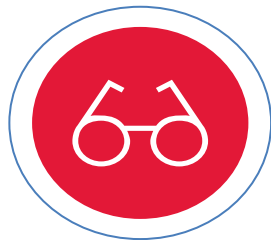
All topics are of general interest. A variety of styles: logical argument, descriptive or narrative.

A note about scoring

Academic Reading		General Training Reading	
Band score	Raw score out of 40	Band score	Raw score out of 40
5	15	4	15
6	23	5	23
7	30	6	30
8	35	7	34

How are they tested?

Passages contain 2,200 – 2,750 words



Skimming



Scanning



Reading for
detail

Reading tips



Written for “native” audience
texts not simplified



Use titles, glossary and headings



Titles – show topic



Glossary – defines important words



Headings – explain topic, point of view of writer, highlight
what can be expected in the test

Question Types

1. Multiple Choice

- detailed understanding of specific points in a text
- general understanding of specific points in a text

2. True / False / Not given

- recognise specific information given in a text

3. Yes / No / Not given

- identify the writer's viewpoint/recognise opinions

4. Matching information / features

- recognise specific information given in the text e.g. find a reason, example, description, comparison

Questions types continued...

5. Matching headings

- identify the general topic of a paragraph/section
- recognise the difference between a main and a supporting idea

6. Sentence completion

- find detail/specific information in a text

7. Summary/note/table/flow chart completion

- identify details/and or main ideas of a text or part of a text

8. Diagram label completion

- understand a detailed description in a text, and then
- relate that description to information given in a diagram

9. Short-answer question

- find specific information in a text

Problems

Spelling words incorrectly or missing a word when transferring the answers over to the mark sheet.

Solution: Ensuring that Ss are trained to check every answer transferred to the mark sheet to check they are correctly spelt. Ss read the answer aloud to themselves to ensure they haven't missed out a word.

Spending too long on one question. Note Ss have 90 secs to answer each question.

Solution: Train Ss to do easier questions in sections 1 & 2 as quickly as possible in order to allow more time to spend on the more challenging sections. If they don't know an answer, leave it and go back to it later, if they still don't know, they should guess the answer, **don't leave the question blank.**

Reading slowly

Solution: Training reading strategies, scanning, skimming and reading for detail. Tell Ss not to read with a pen or their finger, it slows them down. Practice, practice, practice!

And finally...

READ THE QUESTION properly

Check:

- The number of words;
- True/False/Not given **as oppose to** Yes/No/Not given
- Notice whether some questions provide more options for answers than answers (e.g. 6 options /5 answers)

Strategies

Making predictions

- Train Ss to predict what is going to happen next in the text so they can integrate & combine what they have already read with what is to come. This helps them read more quickly, & to engage more with the themes of the text.

Making selections

- Readers who are more proficient are able to continually making decisions about their reading. They can decide, for example, to start with the final paragraph if they have reason to believe they will find the information they need there.

Integrating prior knowledge

- If students have prior knowledge about the information in the texts, they can use this to help them process it more quickly and effectively. **However**, it is important that they are taught not to allow this prior knowledge to interfere with information in the text.

Strategies continued

Skipping insignificant parts

- A good reader will concentrate on significant pieces of information while skipping insignificant pieces. **An example** of this would be to stop reading a paragraph half way through if the reader doesn't believe there will be any relevant information in it.

Re-reading

- Ss should be encouraged to become sensitive to the effect of re-reading on their comprehension. They need to notice when they don't think they have fully understood something significant. **However**, they also need to know how to only do this when necessary, otherwise time can be wasted.

Making use of context or guessing

- Readers should not be encouraged to define and understand every single unknown word in a text. Instead they should learn to make use of context to guess the meaning of unknown words. **However**, should only need to do this in the exam if they think the word is connected to an answer.

Give students an example of any IELTS reading text with a matching headings task. Pull out examples of sentences which give a good indication of the information that will follow, get students to think about what information they would expect to find after them.

'There are many reasons why this was a good idea'

'There are so many steps along the way that can wreak havoc...'

'But they didn't expect what happened next.....'

'The reason for these back up plans is a good one.....'

Ask the students some questions about how these sentences affect their decisions when reading, e.g. 'if you don't have to answer a question about a surprising event, would you read the rest of the paragraph?'

Students then do the task

Follow up questions:

- **Did you decide not to read any parts of the text? Why/why not?**
- **Was it a good decision? Did you miss any important information?**
- **Did you know anything about the information in the text before? What?**
- **Did anything in the text surprise you?**

Strategies continued...

Breaking words into their component parts

- It is very helpful to train your students to break down unknown words into parts to help them guess the meaning. **For example**, if they don't know the word 'unsympathetic', they might be able to work out that it's a negative form as it starts with 'un', and that it's an adjective because it ends with 'thetic'

Reading in chunks

- To help them read faster, Ss should get used to reading groups of words together rather than individual words. **For example**, instead of moving their eyes three times to read 'the most important', they should read all three words in one movement.

Pausing

- Good readers will pause at certain places while reading a text to absorb and internalize the material being read and sort out information.

Activity – Reading in chunks

Engineers all over the world have, through the years, set about designing a flame that resists extinction, to varying degrees of success.

Obviously, an unfair race as the team with the chunks will find it much easier. When that team 'wins', get them to help the other team by putting together the chunks.

After, get Ss to reflect on how recognising chunks of language helps us read much quicker.

If the paragraph is suitable, get the Ss to read it and mark on the text where they paused to think. They can compare the points that they pause at.

Finally...

Paraphrasing

- While reading texts it may be necessary to paraphrase and interpret texts to help the students understand them better. **For example**, they might read 'this is not thought to be a significant factor' and in their head say 'it's not important'. This helps them engage with the text, and also helps them remember the information better.

Monitoring

- Good readers monitor their understanding to evaluate whether the text, or the reading of it, is meeting their goals. This can help them decide if they need to re-read all or part of it. This is especially important in exam conditions when the pressure is on.

Activity

1. Give your students one section of a reading text. Allow them up to 5 minutes to read it. Tell them they are skim reading it for gist.
2. Get them to write down a percentage that represents how confident they feel about their understanding of the text, e.g. 50%
3. Ask the students to write a summary in no more than 3/4 sentences what the text is about.
4. Then get them to put the paper away, and give them the set of questions that come with the text and another 15 minutes to answer the questions.
5. After, Ss look at their summary & percentage they wrote. Do they need to change anything in the summary or the percentage? Try to paraphrase rather than copy from the text.
6. Encourage Ss to reflect on their monitoring skills and lead in to work on paraphrasing using their summaries as a springboard.

Bottom-up approaches (decoding)

- Bottom-up approaches encourage the learners to develop their ability to understand the text at a deeper or more intensive level.
- These are designed to help learners “decode” the text in front of them and, crucially, to give them transferable skills to allow them to comprehend the *next* text they read

Let's look at a couple of activities...

Identifying paraphrasing or lexical variation

Some education specialists recently put on festivals to encourage children to make mistakes! Yes, it's true! The experts were worried that young people were not creative and innovative enough for the modern world.

Identify where the writer has used synonyms to describe the same things.. How could you follow up on this activity?

Advanced readers – decoding complex sentences

Developed countries, like those in Europe and North America, waste around 600 million tonnes of food each year and so do developing countries.

Questions:

- What is the verb?
- Who or what is doing the wasting? Or What/who is the subject?
- What do they waste?
- What does the word 'so' refer back to?
- How could you make this a sentence on its own?

Finally...

Even when a text (for example, in a coursebook) is being mainly used for other purposes such as grammar work or discussion, the teacher can always introduce decoding, just by asking learners:

- “What does the word ‘they’ in line 22 refer to?”
- “Why does the writer use the verb ‘confirm’ rather than ‘say’?”
- How would the sense change if she used ‘claim’ instead?”

These kinds of questions only take a minute or two, but focus the learners’ attention on important details in the text that top-down activities may skip over.

Thank you for participating...



For any advice on IELTS or the Cambridge Exams please drop by and have a chat with Karen and her team at their stand at the conference.