



**Block****1****LEARNING TO READ EFFECTIVELY**

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the course Reading & Speaking Skills!

In today's highly competitive world, being proficient in the 'de facto lingua franca', i.e., English, has moved beyond the clause of desirability to that of absolute necessity. What follows naturally is for you being able to listen, read, speak and write with an impressive command over English. As you all enter the sphere of undergraduate education, most transitioning from the high school and some pursuing a second undergraduate degree, it is imperative for you all to be able to effectively read and speak to make the best use of the study materials as well as the time spent in the study centres interacting with your teachers and fellow students. The course, Reading & Speaking Skills, has been designed with the objective of equipping you all with the requisite skills as well as understanding of important issues to handle the immediate communicative challenges of undergraduate education. Beyond that, it will help you face the greater challenges of personal, professional and social lives.

The course also offers you valuable pointers on correcting pronunciation and puts you through activities like role-plays, debates, presentations, discussions, etc., to prepare you for the variety of occasions where you will need to put your speaking skills to use. Our ultimate goal is to determine how practically translatable are the lessons being catered to you all through the four Blocks under this Course.

The focus on language skills is an empowering one, as in the Indian context, English, in most cases, features as the second language to be added to the palate. Consequently, there are varying proficiency levels and access to resources. In the Indian educational system and its implementation in the different states, there are considerable dissimilarities in terms of the period when learners are first exposed to English. In English-medium institutions, contact with the language occurs at a distinctly early level. However, for vernacular-medium institutions, English comes into the picture at a later stage. This gap has serious implications for learners entering an undergraduate programme with different proficiencies and skills. Through this course, we have tried to address the gap and bring everyone to an optimal level.

There is another crucial point that you all need to realise. When it comes to improving language skills, need can never outweigh interest. It is a social reality that in the Indian context, English has always been associated with upward social mobility, elitism and prestige, academic pursuit, official and administrative usage. However, even with this acknowledgement, the amount of time that most of you devote to the use of English is troublesome. Outside the language classroom, for the majority of learners, the language of interaction with people shifts back to the regional one and you enjoy regional texts in your leisurely reading time. The contextual motivation to learn English is problematic, as beyond the context the need evaporates. When the need evaporates, English takes a backseat. Therefore, it is essential to develop interest in lieu of need, to reap the benefit of a more desirable state of English proficiency, as you get promoted to the subsequent academic level or as you enter the professional sphere.



As you read and speak more in English, besides sharpening your reading and speaking skills, you will also find yourselves demonstrating better vocabulary, better grammatical judgment as well as better understanding of nuances (idioms, proverbs, colloquialities, etc.). Being good readers and speakers boosts your employability in multiple sectors like Copyediting, Proofreading, Accent Training, Human Resources, Public Relations, Communications, etc. But as we address the issue of employability, we must grasp that it is not simply about linguistic competence, but rather about communicative competence, combining different social and cultural vectors. Communicative competence requires the acceptance of variation. This variation can be cultural, socio-economic, perspectival, ideological, etc. When you read, you need to be open to the possibility of the author being from a different background (or mindset) and therefore be flexible enough to interpret the text from the author's context. Similarly, when you speak, you need to consider the possibility of the listener being from a different background and be sufficiently accommodative to understand the relevance of his or her response. The crux is that communication is not a one-way street.

As you learn through this Course, we have included a number of exercises to make you practice what you learn. For your own good, do not skip any of the exercises. In fact, it will be better if you do each exercise a couple of times to perfect your responses. We have supplied sample answers for the exercises. You can consider them as rough models to improve your own answers.

The answer key at the end of each Unit contains answers to all the exercises. In case you need further guidance on understanding the answers or why they are different from your own responses, please feel free to approach your tutor at the study centre. We strongly advise you to consult the provided answers only AFTER you have done the exercises yourself.

We wish you the very best and hope that you enjoy learning through this Course!

THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY

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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

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The first Block aims to enhance your mastery of the English language by specifically targeting reading skills and thereby the process of reading.

While you are acquainted with the process of reading, whereby you first figure out the words and then the sentences to make sense of a text, most of you have not been taught how to read effectively similar to the fact of having not been taught how to listen effectively.

You will learn through this Block that reading is not simply about going from the first page to the last page of a book or a chapter or an article. Effective reading enables you to not only interpret the purpose of what you read but also assess it critically, grasp the prominent ideas and retain them in their situated contexts.

You need to be aware of the reading strategies and hone your reading skills through practice. No matter the field of study you choose to pursue after undergraduation, the profession and organizational position you decide to take up, you will need to read more and more! Therefore, knowing how to read effectively is of paramount importance as you all grow in life.

We hope you find the Block useful.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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# UNIT 1 THE READING PROCESS

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## Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Warm Up
- 1.2 The Modern Classroom Environment: An Overview
- 1.3 Developing Reading Skills
- 1.4 Classification of Reading Techniques
- 1.5 Reading Readiness Exercises
- 1.6 The Reading Process
- 1.7 Stage One of the Reading Process: Elementary Reading
- 1.8 Stage Two of the Reading Process: Intermediate Reading
- 1.9 Stage Three of the Reading Process: Advanced Reading
- 1.10 Reading through Stories
- 1.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.12 Suggested Readings
- 1.13 Answers

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit aims to develop in the learner the ability to:

- understand and identify the four major skills of the English Language;
- develop a thorough understanding of the heterogeneous modern classroom of today;
- understand the reading process as well as its application and relevance to myriad and diverse classroom situations;
- interact with academic content by following the procedural steps of reading;
- achieve an overview of the different stages in the reading process;
- apply the skills and strategies of a successful reader by achieving reading readiness.

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## 1.1 WARM UP

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Answer the following questions about reading based on your own opinion and experience.

- What do you understand by reading?

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- Do you like reading? Why or why not?

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- How often do you read? When and where do you read?  
.....
- What topics and types of matter do you like to read? (newspapers, magazines, novels, comics, etc.)  
.....
- Do you like reading in English? Why or why not? How often do you read in English?  
.....
- What do you or would you like to read about in English?  
.....

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## 1.2 THE MODERN CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: AN OVERVIEW

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The classroom today is a fluid space. Even as you all pursue a distance education programme, you will be receiving certain lectures in your designated study centres or through online platforms. Regardless of regular or distance education, online or offline modality, a classroom as such is not a site for perpetuating undemocratic life. It is not a space for addressing social power. It is not a platform for the display and transmission of the power and knowledge of the educator. It has become a potent site for addressing issues of injustice, inequality and inadequacy; it has evolved as a very plausible field for initiating processes of reflection, research and research as a subversive space for empowering the culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised learners with unbiased knowledge. This can primarily be achieved through reading and discussion since both provide a multiplicity of perspectives and a plethora of insights. Today an effective language lesson must integrate, primarily through reading and explanation, the content, language and culture into learning. The 5Cs of an effective lesson in today’s language classroom are:

- Content
- Communication
- Cognition
- Culture
- Context

In an article by Michael P. Breen titled “The Social Context for Language Learning—A Neglected Situation?”, Breen highlights the study of classroom language learning from two different perspectives namely research and teaching. In particular he interrogates two perspectives:

- What are the specific contributions of the classroom to the process of language development?
- In what ways might the teacher exploit the social reality of the classroom as a resource for the teaching of language?

Now considering whether you meet your Professors regularly in a regular classroom or you meet them in planned sessions in the distance learning mode, a common answer to both the above questions is that this can be achieved by initiating in the students a culture of reading. There exists a very intricate relationship between the social process of learners and their individual psychological processes and thus learning can occur twice: first at the social level and next at the individual level – first when it is between people (inter-psychological) and thereafter when it occurs within the learner (intra-psychological). In this kind of a socio-cultural intercourse, reading directly influences the psychological development of the learner by continuously integrating the learning experiences of each individual with the group as a whole. It is through a consideration of the expectations, values and beliefs of the learner, that the learning group progresses and the learning environment is moderated.

There are various metaphors comparing the classroom situation to an experimental laboratory or a discourse podium and even to a coral garden. The first metaphor of “the classroom as experimental laboratory” is derived from the premise of Stephen Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition Theory. In order to explain the classroom as experimental laboratory, one must understand the primary function of the language classroom as manifested by the correlation between exposure to a linguistic input through reading and the final learning outcome. The value and purpose of the classroom can produce an optimum input for the reader by providing accurate and relevant information as well as holistic knowledge. As you attend the sessions in your designated study centres, your tutors will help you with useful pointers, recap of important ideas and suggestions on how to best utilise the textual resources you have received. In both the regular and the distance learning context, the teacher or the tutor is perceived as a surrogate experimental psychologist, on whose shoulders lies the responsibility of facilitating comprehension for individual learners and reinforcing positive learning behaviours accordingly by encouraging the learners to read. The distinct process in which an acquisition of a language is through a conscious process of absorbing new facts and retaining the information or skills via formal instructions holds true in the metaphor as proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982).

In the second metaphor of “the classroom as discourse”, the primary focus is on classroom-oriented research which intends to understand the discourse of classroom communication. It shows the teachers and learners as active readers engaged with each other whereby the classroom activity and inputs can be explored as a text through reading and discussion. This metaphor reveals much of the specific interaction patterns going on in the particular language learning situation such as teacher-learner negotiation once a passage or text is read.

The third metaphor, which explains “the classroom as coral garden”, derives from Malinowski’s classical studies of Trobriand Island cultures, describing it in *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (Malinowski, 1935). This metaphor articulates the premise that in order to understand a language classroom, observation alone on the surface level of the classroom discourse is inadequate. It is neither practical nor possible to understand the culture of the text just by learning the language or understanding the language by studying the culture and dialects through reading and discourse. The principle of the classroom as a coral garden seeks to emphasize the importance of understanding the classroom situation which can result in increasing learner engagement, motivation and participation for the betterment



of language learning through reading with a highlighted purpose. It highlights the urgency and necessity of perceiving the classroom as a real place with its own culture to help us exploit its complexity as a resource for language learning especially through reading and interpretation. There are eight essential features of the culture of such a language classroom in which learning is achieved through reading and elaboration. This can be perceived as being:

- interactive
- differentiated
- collective
- highly normative
- asymmetrical
- inherently conservative
- jointly constructed
- immediately significant

In the course of explaining his propositions, Breen articulates the definition of the classroom situation in the form of metaphors that can provide directions for exploration and examination within the current language learning process, thus suggesting a possible future investigation for the culture of the language classroom will be more of a revelation rather than just identifying it as a metaphor. In the attempt to relate Breen's metaphor to the contemporary reality of classroom situation, Breen's metaphor could be extended to include "the classroom as terrarium" where a terrarium is a miniature version of an actual ecosystem similar to Breen's metaphor depicting the coral gardens with a collection of small plants growing in a transparent container. Reading thus becomes an essential skill to negotiate the heterogeneous variety of the classroom and also to provide effective student-centred learning.

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### **1.3 DEVELOPING READING SKILLS**

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There are four major English Language Skills which must be developed for complete and holistic language learning and language acquisition. These are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. While all four are equally vital and important for the learner across disciplines, reading is an indispensable part of the learning process and every education programme considers it as a priority among the key goals. Subsequently, the development of powerful reading skills in learners is essential and indispensable. It is through reading that students augment their vocabulary and acquire fresh knowledge of life and the world. Reading is also the primary pre-requisite for one to improve in terms of comprehension, spelling, vocabulary and writing. If not addressed adequately, poor reading skills can adversely impact the performance of learners across a wide variety of curricular disciplines and have a negative impact on both self-motivation and self-esteem.

Reading begins with mastering pre-literacy skills, including learning the alphabet and achieving phonemic awareness. This is followed closely by phonetic and phonemic instruction through human or technological sources and this imparts to learners the skill of mapping recognition: how to match sounds to letters and pronounce words loudly and clearly, understanding the subtle differences between

long and short sounds, vowels and consonants. As a beginner reader gains familiarity with the language and acquires more vocabulary, the process of mapping recognition of sound to word accelerates through the process of full-word recognition or sight-reading. This can be encouraged through direct instruction in high frequency vocabulary or even multi-usage vocabulary. When learners move to higher levels of linguistic familiarity, they are motivated and guided to achieve holistic comprehension through reading and this includes understanding complex texts and processing more information in shorter amounts of time. Being a fast and efficient reader is important not just for classroom-based lessons but also for satisfying requirements of assignments and performing well in standardized exams. However, learners develop and improve their reading skills at different speeds and thereby exhibit different levels of fluency and comprehension.

Learners may be considered to be ready to further develop the skill of reading accurately and appropriately when they:

- identify and differentiate both vowel and consonant sounds in English.
- associate vowel and consonant sounds with letters.
- identify and differentiate among consonant combinations.
- identify and articulate the vowel combinations.
- identify rhyming words even when spelt with a different letter pattern.
- identify upper and lower-case letters as well as italics and the basic punctuation marks in a text.

Achievement of the above indicates that the student has acquired the basic skills of reading. However, there are three common difficulties encountered during the acquisition of reading skills:

- **Challenges of decoding:** This refers to the process of reading and pronouncing words. Decoding occurs when learners are able to put sounds to letters in order to pronounce written language. It's common for non-native readers to face acute difficulty and confusion when they encounter new or unfamiliar expressions and even when they come across homonyms or the issue of different sounds made by the same vowel in different words.
- **Inadequate or faulty comprehension:** Reading involves a process of negotiation from recognition of letters and words to understanding the meanings of phrases, sentences and paragraphs. When a non-native reader encounters vocabulary he or she does not know or does not recognise due to inaccurate decoding, he or she is likely to skip and progress to that part of the text which is simple and familiar. The more blanks in a line of text, the more difficult is the complete comprehension and the more cognitively challenging and frustrating the reading task becomes. To overcome this, the non-native readers need to identify the gist of the passage and highlight the main ideas along with specific details and even infer.
- **Speed:** When learners expand their vocabulary, they recognize more words by sight and the process of reading is accelerated. With copious amounts of reading, the learners' exposure to unfamiliar terms is more likely to increase. Quite often the context, in which these new words are found,

gives readers many of the clues they need, to grasp the meaning. Reading is a cognitively demanding task and absorbing so much information in the mind while continuing to process text, can exhaust non-native readers. Thus, the speed of reading must be moderated by the readers according to their states of proficiency.

- **The Reading-Spelling Correspondence:** English is full of silent letters and unexpected sounds. Many a time the learner is compelled to simply memorize the spelling of a word in order to recognise its written form in the future. Another reason why English is not the easiest language for initial readers is because of the lack of exact correspondence between letters and sounds. In other words, there is more than one way to spell the same sound. This causes acute confusion and extreme difficulty for non-native English users.

### Check Your Progress 1

1) Fill in the blanks using the correct option:

- The metaphor of the classroom as coral garden was proposed by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Stephen Krashen
  - Michael Breen
  - Howard Bloom
- The metaphor of the classroom as experimental laboratory is derived from the premise of the Second Language Acquisition Theory of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Michael Breen
  - Stephen Krashen
  - Howard Boom
- \_\_\_\_\_ is also the primary pre-requisite for one to succeed in comprehension, spelling, vocabulary and writing.
  - Grammar
  - Practice
  - Reading
- \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the process of reading and pronouncing words by mapping the sound to the alphabet.
  - Decoding
  - Coding
  - Recoding

- 2) When a non-native reader encounters vocabulary he or she does not know or does not recognise due to inaccurate decoding, what is he or she likely to do?

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- 3) What is the effect of the above on the comprehension process? How can this be overcome by a non-native English reader?

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- 4) State one major problem of the Reading-Spelling Correspondence.

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## 1.4 CLASSIFICATION OF READING TECHNIQUES

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Reading can be classified into three kinds: extensive reading, intensive reading, and oral reading.

- Extensive reading refers to a culture and practice of reading through cultivating the habit of copious reading. In this approach, there is no overt focus on teaching reading or implementing reading within an instructional setting. The best way for learners to improve their reading skills is to read a variety and a large quantity of comprehensible material according to their respective levels of linguistic proficiency.
- Intensive reading refers to the practice of reading skills in an instructional setting. Readers are exposed to a variety of materials and assigned activities such as answering comprehension questions on the passage they have read. Learners need to look for critical information in the passage they are reading, and make inferences, etc. Intensive reading is instruction-based and forms the core of improving reading skills.

- Oral reading does attract attention in multiple learning contexts; it is an integral part of reading especially in non- native English language contexts.

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## 1.5 READING READINESS EXERCISES

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Before reading one must ensure that the learner is ready to read. This can be accomplished by initiating the process of what is commonly known as Reading Readiness. Reading readiness exercises enable learners to recognize and read the letters and words and thereby mapping recognition is solidified in the mind. Reading readiness exercises may or may not use linguistic materials, but must in every way possible be facilitating and familiar to the learners. The learning outcome of reading readiness exercises is to help foster a congenial atmosphere for learning reading and to develop motivation and interest towards reading. Some of the reading readiness exercises are:

- Visual Discrimination
- Auditory Discrimination
- Memory Training

**Visual Discrimination:** Directions like same, different, top, bottom, middle, first, second and last, etc., referring to objects, letters and words are presented in these exercises. In English, for example, the students need to distinguish between p and q, between d and p, etc. Names and shapes of the letters of the English alphabet, different forms of the same letters (upper and lower case, etc.), the ability to tell whether two letters or groups of letters are the same or different, are all focused in the process of visual discrimination. Some possible discriminations can be checked through questions like, “Which letter is at the top, at the bottom and in the middle of the page?” or “Which object is the first, the second and the last?” or “Are any of the objects, letters, or words the same as the one in the box?” or even, “Pair the capital and the small letters as provided in the examples given in the text.”

**Auditory Discrimination:** Although the auditory discrimination exercises are part of the preparation for listening, these need to be used as reading readiness exercises also. This is important for those learners who hear or repeat a sound persistently incorrectly. Many learners mispronounce the ‘j’ sound for the ‘z’ sound and say “jero” instead of “zero”. There is a close relationship connecting the auditory image of the word, its reading and reproduction in writing. Each word has its own auditory image, and this auditory image needs to be retrieved correctly in the reading process to avoid its mispronunciation, misreading and misspelling. Some possible exercises are minimal pairs like “bit and beat”, initial sounds of successive words, rhyme words, similar or parallel sentences, etc.

**Memory Training:** This training helps learners’ in mental retention (for a short but significant period of time) of facts and data in a text while reading or even after reading. Some such exercises that you are likely to encounter, are:

- Repeat the first three sentences of the first paragraph after completing a reading.
- Sequentially narrate in brief the chronological order of events in a story that has been read.

- Name as many of the objects from memory as possible after a picture has been shown related to a story that will be read.

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## 1.6 THE READING PROCESS

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As you attend the sessions at your study centre, you will find that there are four steps followed in a reading lesson:

- **Introduction:** Here the tutor explains the purpose for reading the selected textual extract or portion and gives you all a setting for the text to be read. Then the tutor presents a background of appropriate information for the text to be read, and selects as well as introduces the new vocabulary necessary to comprehend the main ideas in the text.
- **The reading:** This is generally an oral exercise for the beginners, usually consisting of listening to the passage read aloud, or listening and following along. Later on, reading is procedural and repetitive or slow and silent.
- **Comprehension tasks:** After one or more readings are done, certain questions are set on the passage studied in order to elicit factual or inferential information based upon your understanding of the textual extract.
- **Review and related exercises:** These may consist of summary, review, stylistic analysis, précis writing and other formative and summative exercises to enhance your understanding and to evaluate your ability of comprehension and identification of salient points of the reading passage.

During a reading lesson in your sessions at the study centre, the following steps should be carefully followed:

- In the study centre, as the tutor reads aloud, you all should listen attentively and follow the text as the lines on a page are progressively pronounced or spoken aloud.
- The tutor will occasionally stop to highlight the meanings of words in between the reading and engage in discussion on specific portions during gaps in reading.
- The tutor will read and encourage you all to repeat, listen and read along, following his/her pronunciation and then proceed to make you all highlight important portions.
- The tutor will elicit questions or conduct a discussion on stylistic or grammatical points of importance.
- The tutor will generate and supervise discussion on theme and content.
- As all of this happens, you all are encouraged to either read silently or practice reading aloud individually with the tutor's permission.
- Three types of questions may follow from the tutor for discussion:



**Learning to Read Effectively**

- Informative or factual: those which begin with what, when, where, who, how many, etc.
- Inferential: those questions which may be answered by evaluating the information given such as: did the hero feel scared by the villain's intimidating manner and aggressive threats?
- Interpretative: questions relating to the author's opinion and a reader's judgment about the style and content of the text.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) How is intensive reading different from extensive reading?

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2) Why are auditory discrimination exercises important for reading?

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3) How does memory training help in reading readiness?

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4) What do review and related exercises consist of and how are they helpful in the process of reading?

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## 1.7 STAGE ONE OF THE READING PROCESS: ELEMENTARY READING

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Reading by English language learners can be understood as a skill acquisition process in three stages:

In the first stage which is usually referred to as Elementary Reading, the learners are taught the process of associating the letters of the English alphabet with their relevant sounds in appropriate contexts. In this process, they discover the relationship between the alphabet and the spoken language. Readers are given sets of simple words, phrases and sentences with the focus being on one or two letters and their combinations. They are introduced to the correspondence between the individual letters and their combinations in slow and graded steps.

They come to internalize, in an inductive manner, the possibilities of sound values for each letter, or combination of letters. This leads to an emphasis upon decoding graphic information from the words, phrases, and sentences. With their new-found familiarity and ability to form correspondences, learners then begin to read new combinations of vocabulary and sentence structures. They are now able to accurately predict the sound systems represented by the letters and their word formation combinations in various contexts.

There may be various types of elementary readers ranging from a child or an illiterate to an adult second or foreign language learner of English, who is not proficient in the target language. He/she may be highly educated or a moderately educated person in his/her own native language. At the beginning level, irrespective of age and background, the focus must be mainly on the mechanics of reading. The beginner needs to learn about the relationship and the correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and the spoken language.

Before reading skills are developed at the beginner's level, learners must note and follow these guidelines:

- The tutor or the instructor must have adequate knowledge of the academic and linguistic background of the beginner reader or non-native speaker.
- The reading task involves decoding the system of abstract symbols to discover its relation to the spoken language system and thus association and correspondence must be imbibed and imparted correctly.
- The time taken to master the practice of association and correspondence will differ with age, maturity, previous experience, and other social factors.
- With primary emphasis on mechanics, learners can excel in the mechanics of reading in a few months.
- Words, which express familiar meanings or meanings which can be recognized, are retained in memory and thus must be chosen judiciously.
- The choice of words must focus on the text to be studied.
- At this stage, such words must be avoided as those which may have the same spelling in English as well as in the learner's language, but are read (pronounced) differently.

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## 1.8 STAGE TWO OF THE READING PROCESS: INTERMEDIATE READING

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The intermediate reading stage fosters interest in reading, and develops the actual reading skill practiced throughout the learners' lives beyond mastering the association between letters and sounds. Intermediate readers read silently and confidently predict the sound values of letters and their combinations, and they begin to read for academic purposes. Emphasis, here, is on developing additional reading skills towards reading with a purpose. In the Intermediate Reading level, the learners progress to reading advanced English passages with the emphasis being on overall comprehension and retention. This focuses on the development of study skills and textual organization.

At the intermediate stage of reading, learners should read such content that introduces them subtly to the grammatical and stylistic conventions of English. Reading should be done in a way that through these passages, learners can internalize the grammatical structures of English. These structures of English are linked to the reading process and the goals of reading. For example, learners may understand through reading practice that certain phrases predict the transition in information discussed in the reading material.

In this stage the following pre-reading guidelines should be followed.

- The learner should read and examine the title and the headings for each section and attempt to predict what the passage will have as its central theme;
- The learner should read the first and last paragraphs and the first sentence of each paragraph to attempt to predict the focus of the passage;
- The learner should read the title and skim the passage to circle all the words that may have a connection with the title;
- The learner should scan the passage and highlight all the words that are unfamiliar. The learner should then do a second reading of the passage and guess or conjecture the meanings of these unfamiliar words in the context of the passage. However, if the meanings are still elusive, then the words must be looked up in a dictionary;
- The learner should try to think about and analyse the nature of the content in the passage after reading: fiction or non-fiction, etc.;
- The learner should also contemplate after reading why would somebody read this passage: for information or pleasure;
- The learner should try to tell a story about the background of the reading passage, or create an alternative ending to the passage, in a conversation with friends, after reading is complete.

In the intermediate stage, several intermediate reading skills can be acquired through these procedures. They are:

- Reading with incomplete information

- Organizing for careful reading by skimming and scanning
- Organizing information
- Reading critically
- Developing effective personal reading strategies
- Establishing effective and differentially paced reading for different kinds of reading

In the reading process, at the intermediate stage of reading, the success of a learner depends a lot on the initiative he or she is willing to take and the positive attitude that is inculcated towards reading. The learners should recognize the pivotal role reading plays in improving their diction and pronunciation, even as it helps them internalize the structures of English. The learners should discover for themselves how rigorous reading habits help them enhance their linguistic and academic performance in English in a holistic way. Reading materials are easily available and a plethora of daily, relevant and engaging material in our surroundings can be used to our advantage in order to understand better both culture and literature. If the reading materials chosen are relevant, and fulfil the learners' needs, they will help develop an interest in reading and also improve their optimal reading speeds. This is also another focus at the intermediate stage of the reading process.

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## **1.9 STAGE THREE OF THE READING PROCESS: ADVANCED READING**

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In the intermediate stage, most learners are content with their achievement of personal reading as it is both fluent and purposeful compared to the elementary stage of the reading process. However, reading is a continuing process, and despite their feeling of accomplishment, learners must necessarily move on to the reading of authentic texts for specific purposes. Stories re-told, as well as abridged and adapted versions are focused in the intermediate level but at the advanced level, originals are studied and exhaustive reading becomes important. Advanced reading is therefore a stage of the reading process that is based on a wide variety of authentic texts and on tasks that represent how a learner would negotiate these texts in a real-life situation rather than a conventional assessment exercise. The aim of advanced reading is to go beyond mere understanding and delve deeper into layers of meanings, references and suggestions implicit in a text. Learners need to form individual opinions about the text or express personal responses to the text in terms of interpretation, evaluation, criticism and application of other contexts or disciplines or situations. Advanced reading leads to complex thinking and is simply a preliminary step towards further learning of various skills and purposes.

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### **1.10 READING THROUGH STORIES**

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Short stories serve as a relaxing break from routine, lengthy and academic texts as well as interesting lesson exercises. Selection of short stories for reading by adult learners is different from selection of materials by children because the former might lose interest if the text is too simple and the latter may do the same if the text is too difficult and abstruse.

While adult readers select appropriate short stories, the following factors come into play:

- **Complexity of Vocabulary:** The story should have enough words that the majority of the readers are able to understand, while at the same time include sufficiently complex words which they can decode.
- **Simplicity of Language:** The stories should not have too many idioms or arcane and archaic language, as that might also be too difficult and disinteresting.
- **Relevance of theme and content:** The content should be relevant in such a way that topics of relationships, business situations, family life or even something personal and intimate can be related to by the readers, culturally and professionally.
- **Potential for Discussion:** The story must provide interesting themes or discussion questions keeping in mind the contemporary situation and critical thinking.

**Reading is thus an exercise that can be enhanced through several procedural steps by various strategies and activities structured to develop effective reading skills that will eventually form the basis for the development of communication skills and self-expression through appropriate vocabulary.**

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) In your opinion, how is the elementary reading stage important in the overall development of reading skills?

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- 2) Discuss three major pre-reading guidelines to be followed by the reader for intermediate reading.

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3) What is the primary aim of the advanced reading stage?

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4) Why are short stories easier to read? Why are short stories selected differently for different categories of readers?

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## 1.11 LET US SUM UP

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**In this Unit, we have discussed the various aspects of the process of reading. The highlights are as follows:**

- Reading is a crucial skill to address the demands of educational coursework as well as professional spaces and also to ensure effective learning coupled with personal enrichment.
- Reading begins with mastering pre-literacy skills, including learning the alphabet and achieving phonemic awareness.
- Reading can be classified into three kinds: extensive reading, intensive reading and oral reading.
- There are four procedural steps in a reading lesson and it consists of three stages: elementary, intermediate and advanced.

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## 1.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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If you would like to learn more about the process of reading, you may consult:

Deanne Spears, *Improving Reading Skills: Contemporary Readings for College Students Seventh Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013)

Gordon Wainwright, *How to read faster and recall more...* (Oxford: How To Books, 2007)

Martin Montgomery et al., *Ways of Reading: Advanced reading skills for students of English literature* (London: Routledge, 2007)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.



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## 1.13 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

1) (a). (ii), (b). (ii), (c). (iii), (d). (i)

For answers to 2, 3 and 4, refer to 1.3.

### Check Your Progress 2

For the answer to 1, refer to 1.4.

For answers to 2 and 3, refer to 1.5.

For answers to 4 and 5, refer to 1.6.

### Check Your Progress 3

For the answer to 1, refer to 1.7.

For the answer to 2, refer to 1.8.

For the answer to 3, refer to 1.9.

For the answer to 4, refer to 1.10.



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## UNIT 2 DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Types of Reading
- 2.3 Study Reading
- 2.4 Reading Faster
- 2.5 Let us Sum Up
- 2.6 References
- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Answers

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- understand the importance of good reading skills;
- enumerate and use different types of reading strategies; and
- enumerate and use different strategies to improve reading rate for faster reading.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Reading is a multifaceted cognitive process of decoding printed or written words to get the meaning. It involves word recognition, language processing, comprehension and fluency. Many students consider reading a chore because they connect it only with learning complex information from textbooks prescribed in the curriculum. However, reading is a basic skill that we use every day in a variety of situations. For instance, looking at the notice board to find an advertisement for a flat or a job vacancy would require you to quickly locate the relevant information and reject the irrelevant to extract the required facts. Additionally, reading a newspaper, a magazine or a blog not only requires you to read the content, but also get a more detailed comprehension than just being able to get the gist. Thus, be it for understanding instructions on a medicine bottle or for filling out an application form, reading is an important fundamental skill needed to function actively in the society today as an informed citizen and even for conducting activities in our personal lives. Let us consider the various kinds of reading material that one usually comes across in different situations in real life:

- 1) Literary texts like novels, short stories, poems, plays, biographies, essays, diaries, etc.
- 2) Texts for communication like emails, messages, letters, postcards, telegrams, etc.
- 3) Business or work-related texts like forms, instructions, catalogues, brochures, reports, reviews, rules and regulations, notices, notes, minutes of meetings, etc.

- 4) Media related texts like newspapers, magazines, online articles, editorials, blogs, pamphlets, advertisements, etc.
- 5) Graphic texts like graffiti or comic strips, posters, warnings, road signs, maps, etc.
- 6) Academic texts like textbooks, handbooks, guidebooks, dictionaries, phrasebooks, etc.
- 7) Other miscellaneous types like recipes, menu, price list, etc.

In addition to this, reading is an active skill. It entails guessing, forecasting, anticipating, checking and introspection. It is because while reading, our eyes do not follow each word of the text, word after word. This holds true especially for efficient readers. Many words and expressions are simply skipped as they are read. Also, more than what one finds in the text, what one brings to the text by predicting is usually more important for reading quickly. Therefore, one should first consider the known elements before proceeding to interpret unknown aspects of the text; whether it is vocabulary or ideas. This is a global approach to reading a text and would involve the following steps:

- 1) study of the layout: title, length, pictures, typeface of the text
- 2) making hypothesis, anticipation about the content and deciphering function/ purpose of the text
- 3) confirming the hypotheses by considering what one is cognizant of in such text types in the first reading.
- 4) second reading for further confirmation through skimming; it includes making more detailed prediction or revision of thought

To give you more insights into developing better reading skills this module will briefly discuss the different types of reading, the strategies of reading efficiently and tips to improve your reading rate to read faster.

Now go through all the sections and answer the questions given in 'Check Your Progress'. This will help you to remember the important points. We do hope you enjoy working through this Unit.

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## 2.2 TYPES OF READING

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Any type of reading that is done, is usually done for two main reasons/ purposes:

- a) **Reading for Pleasure:** Reading for pleasure is when we read because of our own free will expecting to derive intellectual satisfaction and joy. It is also called reading for recreation and is mostly done voluntarily and enthusiastically. Although it can also be done on someone else's suggestion but we do it mostly as a habit, at a time and place of our choice. There have been number of research studies to validate the benefits of reading for pleasure. Some of the benefits are improved vocabulary/spellings/grammar due to incidental learning, better language competence, improved problem-solving capacity, better social/attitudinal/communication competencies and better average academic scores. Additionally, many studies suggest that reading for pleasure improves general knowledge. It also enhances understanding of other cultures, self-confidence, improves decision making power as well as provides greater insights into human nature.

- b) **Reading for Information:** When we read a text or common workplace document to find out some information or gain knowledge from the content, it is called reading for information. In academic or official context this type of reading is most applicable and involves detailed understanding of the content with requisite personal responses like summarizing, discussing the main ideas or answering the questions.

Irrespective of the purposes mentioned above, the general aims of developing reading skills are as follows:

- 1) to be able to read without help, on one's own, in real life outside the classroom
- 2) to be able to read unfamiliar texts that one has never tackled before
- 3) to be able to read authentic texts (authentic texts such as articles, blogs, novels etc. are written for real world purposes to inform, explain, guide, document or even entertain)
- 4) to be able to read different texts with appropriate speed instead of plodding through all the texts at the same speed
- 5) to be able to read silently as we seldom need to read aloud in real life
- 6) to be able to read with adequate understanding to suit our purpose

Despite being a basic/essential skill for academic success, reading is often overlooked by many students who focus more on developing writing skills. Thus, an important question to consider when we focus on improving reading skills is, **how do we read?** A good reader varies his /her speed of reading according to the nature and purpose of reading. Such a reader would also change the attitude, approach and technique according to the type of the text. For instance, the way one reads the directions to assemble the parts of a doll or an airplane, or instructions to bake a cake would be very different from the way one reads a legal document to fully understand all the legal provisions. Similarly, one would also employ a different method to read a bestseller on a journey. A huge mistake many students commit is that they read all types of texts by plodding through the written material word by word. One must avoid this and should be flexible in using varying speed and techniques of reading.

Some main techniques of reading are as follows:

**Skimming:** When we quickly read the text to glean the gist of it, it is called skimming. In this technique one goes through the reading material to sift the essence of the text, to understand the organization of ideas and the tone or the intention of the writer. Thus, it needs glancing rapidly through the text. We often do it when we skim through the newspaper to see if there is anything worth reading in detail or even when we quickly browse through the pages of a book to find out its subject matter.

**Scanning:** When we speedily dart through a text to find particular information such as a name, a date etc. it is called scanning. In this technique one often does not follow the linearity of the passage. The eyes are simply allowed to wander over the text until we spot what we are looking for. It also requires us to reject or pass over irrelevant information. Thus, the purpose of this technique is very limited. We use this technique while checking out table of contents or while trying to find a person's telephone number in the telephone directory.

These two techniques of reading are not mutually exclusive. At times both are blended for quick and efficient reading. For instance, one may skim through an article first just to decide if it is worth reading. Then later during second or third reading one may scan it to note down a figure or name which we need to remember particularly.

Now we must also learn the difference between the two types of reading that are often employed in the context of studying. They are described traditionally as intensive and extensive reading indicating different procedures and purposes. These are also called reading for accuracy and reading for fluency respectively.

**Intensive Reading:** When we read texts of short length to extract specific information, it is called intensive reading. This type of reading demands accuracy as we read for details. This requires reading short passage and then examining it closely and in great detail, with an aim to obtain a thorough understanding of the text. This is often undertaken under guidance of a teacher. This method improves one's power of judgment, discriminative reasoning based on interpretation and appreciation. As one pays attention to the logical development of ideas and arguments and even the writing style used in the text it also helps to improve our concentration level.

**Extensive Reading:** Extensive reading involves reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure without bothering to check every unknown word. The aim of this type of reading is to train ourselves to read fluently without the aid of teacher. According to Prof. Stephen Krashen, "...reading for pleasure [extensive reading] is the major source of our reading competence, our vocabulary and our ability to handle complex grammatical constructions." For this type of reading a wide variety of interesting material which is readily and easily accessible in language is chosen for reading which could be artistic, political, social or even scientific. As this is a fluency activity, it mainly involves global comprehension (understanding the general meaning). To inculcate the habit of extensive reading one must make reading a part of daily routine and read any book for at least 30 minutes at a stretch. Setting a time, a place and deciding the number of books that you would like to finish reading in a given time can be very beneficial. One can also carry the book along and read whenever one gets a chance. Keeping a journal to note down your thoughts and responses is also a good practice.

Let us now look at some points one should keep in mind while choosing a book for extensive reading:

- 1) Ask for suggestions but choose the book that piques your interest.
- 2) Instead of an anthology of articles/stories choose a full-length book. It would allow you more time to become familiar and comfortable with author's style and vocabulary.
- 3) Do not pick up a book that you are familiar with or have read in another language. A familiar book might seem less interesting.
- 4) Read the front and back covers to decide if you want to read the book. Also read the first few pages to become familiar with the style and subject.
- 5) Make sure that the book is not too difficult for you to read. If it is too difficult to read it may prove to be too challenging or discouraging, whereas

the content may seem boring if it is too easy to read. One way to do this is by counting the number of unknown keywords on a page. A keyword is a word that one must know in order to get the general meaning of the text. If there are more than five unknown key words on a page that means it would be difficult for you to read. If there are no unknown words then it is too easy for you.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) How is intensive reading different from extensive reading?

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2) What is the difference between skimming and scanning?

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3) Briefly discuss the general aims of developing reading skills.

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4) What are the steps to first analyse the known elements before moving on to the unknown aspects while reading a text?

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## 2.3 STUDY READING

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While skimming, scanning or zooming are important reading strategies that enable us to get a 'drift' of what the author is saying or the gist of content, yet as college students you are required to do study reading for better academic performance. You need to do immense amount of reading in detail for your courses and are expected to remember the concepts and ideas in the books prescribed in the curriculum. This requires engagement with the text on your part. It requires you to be able to read carefully and thoughtfully. For this purpose, there are a number of strategies. A few that you can start using easily have been suggested below:

Strategy 1: Text Marking

Strategy 2: Writing Questions

Strategy 3: Associating Graphics with Ideas.

Strategy 4: Summarizing a Paragraph/Chapter

**Let us now discuss them one by one.**

### 1) Text Marking

While reading a lengthy text dense with numerous facts and ideas, it is beneficial to mark things that you need to remember. You could also highlight them so that they stand out visually. These markings and highlights then can be used for reviewing and remembering. Keep in mind that you should mark only the most important ideas and information like: the topic, the thesis statement, the main idea, details like the date or names, and even statements that differ from the main idea and points or words that are difficult to understand. Previewing a text and marking it with pencil is better as changes can be made later if necessary. Marking can be done in different ways. You can try any of these or even develop your personal style by combining many of these.

- underlining with pencil
- circling the words or putting them in the box
- drawing arrows
- writing the keywords, date and names in the margin
- putting a question or exclamation mark to express your reaction
- numbering points in a series
- making a star in the margin against an important point

### 2) Writing Questions

Forming questions after marking the text is a powerful strategy to reinforce learning. Writing down these questions helps us to sharpen our understanding. You can make questions using the title, headings and subheadings and quiz questions on the text. These are also called reading response questions. A few examples for you to follow are:

- What is the paragraph about?
- What is the meaning of this phrase?
- What is the key idea in this passage?

- What is my existing knowledge about this topic?
- Why is this example important?
- How does the title justify the theme?

### 3) Associating Graphics with Ideas

Graphs, charts, tables and diagrams are often used in textbooks, articles, newspapers to illustrate a point. One should always study these graphics carefully and connect them to the relevant part of the text. You can also use drawing or sketching for better understanding of what you read as they facilitate visualization. For instance, after reading an article you can draw a flow chart or diagram to capture main ideas.

### 4) Summarizing a Paragraph/Chapter

In order to remember important ideas presented in a text, rewriting the major parts in shorter form in reports using some key words from the text and paraphrasing is very useful. It is especially beneficial for memorizing important information for exams. The first step in writing a summary is to first write one sentence summary of each passage and then combine them to compose the summary of the entire passage. Pay attention to the topic sentence as it often contains the important details. Don't forget to include the main idea and all the supporting facts. Do not put extra /additional facts, ideas or opinions that are not mentioned in the paragraph into the summary. Students usually find summarizing a book chapter somewhat easier than summarizing article or essay. It is because the text of a book chapter is often divided into sections and subsections. While reading one must pay a lot of attention to the introduction to a chapter as it contains thesis statement and directions about how will it be structurally and thematically organized. The headings and subheadings usually correspond to the key ideas mentioned in the statement of purpose. Textbook sections are often arranged in listing pattern. A point to note here is that if textbook passage contains complex ideas which are difficult to capture in one sentence then one can make more sentences but should try to be as concise as possible.

### Critical Reading

Critical reading means being judicious about what you are reading by exercising your judgment and not taking the information at face value. The word critical does not imply being dismissive of any idea or information as flawed/faulty. In academic sense it means evaluating the text not just by assessing author's opinion and interpretation but also looking for omissions, inconsistencies and oversights in the flow of arguments.

The first objective of any reading is obviously to understand accurately the content but it is also essential for students to be able to read critically and analytically by establishing correlation between several ideas contained in the text beyond the superficial order, to identify author's purpose and tone, to make accurate inferences about author's opinion and make judgment about the validity of facts presented. A good critical reader is able to paraphrase the key points in one's own words, compare and contrast the ideas with other related material and present a full analysis of the text.

The ability to read critically is crucial these days as the information available in print or on web is not necessarily true. This is especially relevant when you

consider information on the web because anyone can create a website and put information on internet. Thus, asking questions in order to check the validity of the text and to ensure the credentials of the writer is important. Some important questions that one can ask oneself to read critically are:

- What is the source of this information? Is it valid? Is it based on reliable sources?
- Who is the writer? What are his/her qualifications?
- If it is a website then is it open-source like *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopaedia?
- Does the website belong to any organization? What is the credibility of the organization?
- Can the information be trusted?
- What is the apparent purpose and intent of the website/writer in publishing this? Is it trying to convince you or influence you to adhere to the published opinion?
- What is the point of view of the author?
- What is your level of awareness about the topic and how does this information compare with that?
- Do I agree or disagree with this information?

For information obtained from the internet, one has to first choose the source from many sites listed on Google and search engine. A lot can be ascertained about a website by just looking at the web address or URL. The sites that appear at the beginning of a list are the ones that are most connected with other websites. Pay attention to the word 'blog'. This indicates that the web page expresses opinions and experiences of the author. Other than verifying the source of the text one should also examine the text, be it from the web or in print form from textbooks for the following aspects:

- 1) **Determining author's purpose for writing the text:** Usually there are three main purposes that are: to inform facts and explain ideas to the reader, to persuade the reader for or against an argument by using facts or opinions and to entertain the reader with narrative imbued with suspense and stories. The writer may prioritize one purpose but any piece of writing can achieve one or more purposes as well. In order to identify writer's purpose, use the following guidelines: If the text contains several facts then the purpose could be to inform or persuade the reader. If the language is objective and neutral then the purpose could be to inform the reader. If the language is strongly emotive with positive or negative sentiments then the purpose could be to persuade the reader. If the focus is on description of amusing and intriguing incidents then the purpose could be to entertain the reader.
- 2) **Determining the point of view of the writer:** Every author writes with a particular attitude, opinion or attitude towards a certain topic. This is informed by the past experiences and background of the writer. This also affects the facts and arguments presented in the text. To identify the point of view one should look at the thesis statement closely and examine the kind of supportive arguments made to corroborate the same.

- 3) **Recognizing the presence of possible bias where the writer may be favoring/advocating particular beliefs:** Bias means disproportionate inclination, predisposition or prejudice for or against a person or idea. It can impact the reader by creating a limited or flawed perception. The words chosen by the author can influence the feelings of the readers. Thus, it is important to identify it so as to make a fair judgment about author's ideas. Biased writing usually has the following characteristics: one sided arguments, evocative language inciting fear, anger, pity or outrage, facts or examples stated only to support the writer's opinion and contempt for counter-views. Political, racial or religious bias may be present in a variety of texts such as newspaper reports, magazines, even in textbooks.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) What are the steps to be followed and things to be kept in mind while summarising a paragraph/chapter?

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- 2) Recall and explain a few strategies to do efficient study reading.

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- 3) Why is critical reading important?

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**2.4 READING FASTER**

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Reading quickly is as important as reading correctly. Fluent readers with an impressive reading rate are able to adjust the speed of reading according to the type of content and the purpose of reading. Reading rate is indicated by measuring words per minute (WPM). According to experts a reading rate which is less than 200-250 indicates word-by-word reading. One should not read everything at the

same rate. The ability to read at a faster rate enables the reader to read more efficiently, do extensive reading of books and also improve reading comprehension. However, a good rate of reading doesn't mean that one reads everything rapidly without appropriate comprehension. It is not the same as 'speed reading' which is advertised on self-help books with tag lines such as "Read a novel in an hour!". Instead it means that one is flexible in increasing the speed or slowing down as per the type of material or the purpose of reading. To be able to assess what your reading speed is, you can use the following strategies:

### 1) Checking Reading Habits

Do you speak every word silently, aloud? Or do you move your lips when you read? The effort to pronounce every word slows the reader. It hinders comprehension. Also, if you follow every word with your finger or pencil through a text it will hamper your speed. Good readers often jump ahead for new information to read quickly. They move their eyes to follow their thoughts and not the finger. Translating the text into one's native language to make sense of what one has read also reduces the rate of reading.

### 2) Reading Chunks

Efficient readers read in chunks. Chunks are meaningful groups of words or phrases that are easier to remember in comparison to lot of unconnected distinct words. Reading in chunks also enables forming connections between various ideas in the text. It is easier for our mind to process information when it is divided into meaningful phrases.

### 3) Skipping Over Unknown Words

Good readers skip over unknown words. They do not stop reading because knowing the meaning of all the words is not necessary for understanding the key ideas in the content. Moreover, guessing a general sense of the word from the context is usually enough.

### 4) Reading Sprints and Rate Practice through Extensive Reading

People who read slowly do so because they are accustomed to do so as a habit. Reading sprint means reading quickly. Just like runners practice running faster to increase their speed, reading sprints help us to increase our reading rate gradually by breaking the old habit of reading slowly. You can use extensive reading books for this. At first you might find it very challenging and comprehend very little of the content that you scurry through but with practice you will be able to understand better. **You can use the following instructions to do reading sprints:**

- a) Select a book of your choice for extensive reading and keep close a reliable watch for keeping time.
- b) Use a pencil to mark the starting time on the margin of the page from where you begin to read.
- c) Read for five minutes. Then stop and count the number of pages you have read.
- d) Now count ahead the same number of pages as you have managed to read in five minutes in the earlier sprint.

- e) Now read the next few pages that you have marked again in the given five minutes.
- f) If you do not succeed then keep trying by sprint reading new pages every time until you succeed.
- g) At this point don't worry much about comprehending everything absolutely. Focus more on reading faster by making your eyes move quickly along the page. You can re-read these pages afterward for getting the full meaning.
- h) As you get better at it, try to reduce the time limit for reading the same number of pages and repeat the process.
- i) After a few attempts calculate your reading rate (counting average number of words per page). Keep a track by checking your rate regularly and marking it on a progress chart.

**Steps to calculate your reading rate are as follows:**

- a) Take your extensive reading book to calculate average number of words per page.
- b) Take a full page with little or no dialogues or graphics.
- c) Count the number of words in three lines and divide it by 3. This will give you average number of words per line.
- d) Now count the number of lines on that page and multiply with the average number of words per line. This will yield the average number of words per page.
- e) Time your reading as instructed above. If you read for ten minutes then that will be the reading time.
- f) Now multiply the number of pages by number of words per page that you calculated earlier. This will give you the total number of words you have read on the counted number of pages.
- e) Then divide the total number of words you have read on these pages by number of minutes. You now have your reading rate.

**5) Timed Reading Practice**

Timed reading is reading passages against the clock and then answering comprehension questions. To do this first calculate your reading rate (WPM) and then set a goal that you would like to achieve. Then practice reading sprint. But this time after you finish reading also answer the questions based on the passage then check how many you got correct. For this you can take help of your teacher as well. The number of answers you get correct will be your comprehension score. The objective here is to force your eyes to move faster on the page while keeping the comprehension score good. Something to remember here is that if your reading rate is the same despite several attempts then you need to move your eyes ahead faster. However, if your comprehension score is very low then it's possible that you might have been reading too fast. Your aim

should be to increase your reading rate gradually while not compromising your comprehension score. Your comprehension score should be at least six or more correct answers.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Why is reading word-by-word problematic?

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- 2) Name and briefly explain the strategies to read faster.

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**2.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit we have discussed the different types of reading based on purpose and techniques. We understood that reading is a multifarious mental process involving word recognition, language processing, comprehension and fluency through which we decode meaning of written words. Many students do not recognise the importance of reading as a fundamental skill needed for success in any field and regard it as a chore. However, reading is a basic skill that we use every day in a variety of situations. Also, it is an active skill because a reader brings a lot to the text in terms of understanding as reading requires guessing, predicting, previewing, anticipating and even checking oneself.

Efficient readers indulge in intensive as well as extensive reading. They often do not read every word on the page and employ skimming and scanning whenever needed. In skimming, we go through the passage to get the gist of the text. In scanning, we go through the passage to pick out specific information. However, for study reading one needs to actively engage with the text to remember all the important details and ideas. Thus, for achieving this, strategies like marking the text with a pencil, making questions, connecting diagrams, sketches, summarizing and paraphrasing are very useful.

In this Unit you have also learned about critical reading and its importance. The word ‘critical’ does not imply being dismissive of any idea or information as flawed/faulty. On the contrary, it means reading the text judiciously to assess the author’s opinion, bias or oversights. It also involves judging the validity and credibility of the source of information, especially if the content is taken from an internet resource.

Lastly, we discussed ways to improve reading rate to read faster. Reading every text word by word slows us down. One should be flexible in applying reading speed. Having a good reading rate is as important as having the ability to read correctly.

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## 2.6 REFERENCES

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Jeffries, Linda. *Advanced Reading Power*. Longman, 2007.

Mikulecky, B.S. et al. *More Reading Power*. Addison Wesley publishing Company, 1996.

Subramaniam, et al. *Unit 12 Developing Reading Skills*. IGNOU, 2018.

Web resource: <http://egyankosh.ac.in//handle/123456789/46789>

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## 2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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If you would like to read more or would like to practice the strategies and techniques discussed in this Unit, then you can use the following resources.

Deanne K. Milan, *Developing Reading Skills Second Edition* (McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1987)

Francoise Grellet, *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Paula J. Clarke et al., *Developing Reading Comprehension* (Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 1989)

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## 2.8 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

For answers to 1, 2 & 3, refer to 2.2.

For the answer to 4, refer to 2.1.

### Check Your Progress 2

For all answers, refer to 2.3.

### Check Your Progress 3

For all answers, refer to 2.4.



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## **UNIT 3 LEARNING READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES**

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### **Structure**

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Warm up
- 3.2 Definition and Levels of Comprehension
- 3.3 Types of Reading Comprehension
- 3.4 Strategies of Reading Comprehension
- 3.5 Skills for Reading Comprehension
- 3.6 Academic Reading and Knowledge in Comprehension
- 3.7 Let us Sum Up
- 3.8 Suggested Readings
- 3.9 Answers

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### **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit will develop in the learners the ability to do the following in a comprehension passage:

- identify the main idea(s) in the text, identify specific details, distinguish main idea(s), distinguish fact from opinion; make inferences and predictions based on information in the text; infer meanings of unfamiliar words and achieve an overall understanding of the text;
- skim for main idea(s) in the passage, scan for details in the contents of the passage, summarize and paraphrase information in a text;
- develop reading speed and enhance academic vocabulary, make use of contextual clues to infer meanings of unfamiliar words from context, distinguish main ideas from specific details, facts from opinions, make inferences and predictions based on comprehension of a text;
- identify author's purpose and tone, discuss and respond to content of the text orally as well as in writing;
- utilize digital literacy tools to develop reading and vocabulary skills, use graphic organizers to better understand a text, transfer information in the text into a graphic organizer, and create mind maps if required;
- discover and utilize academic vocabulary appropriately, orally and in writing; and answer questions related to the text of the passage as well as summarize/paraphrase information in a text; and
- use various strategies of reading such as receptive reading, reflective reading, skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading.

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### 3.1 WARM UP

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Answer the following questions about reading based on your own opinion and experience.

- What do you aim to do to understand a literary text by reading?
- Do you like reading? If so why? What is your speed of reading in words or pages per minute?
- What is your focus when you read a literary text? Do you focus on exhaustive reading, skimming, scanning or cursory reading?
- What do you do to understand the meanings of difficult words? Do you use a dictionary or try to guess the meaning from the context?
- What is your favourite style of reading and why? How often do you read?
- Do you prefer short passages or longer extracts? What are the factors that govern your choice of passages to be read?

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### 3.2 DEFINITION AND LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION

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Comprehension is the most necessary academic activity in reading and academic discourse. It is one of the most important skills in language teaching. It refers to understanding of a literary or linguistic passage by a reader in terms of both the lexical and the syntactical structures as well as the many layers of meaning embedded in the content of a passage. It involves the accurate association of meanings with word symbols, the choice of the appropriate meaning implied in the context, the logical arrangement of words to form contextual meanings, the ability to logically and rationally analyse smaller ideas and vocabulary segments, and the ability to understand the larger meaning of the ideas contained in the content of any literary work.

Reading comprehension can be described simply as understanding by thinking. To comprehend a passage, one needs to understand language patterns, to recognise the structural elements in composing a sentence and to grasp the syntactic interrelationship of these elements. Comprehension comprises the use of two general mental abilities, the ability to remember word meanings and the ability to logically analyse and see the connection between verbal concepts i.e. words. Comprehension is a process of deep thinking and it involves meticulous reading. Thus, it is dependent upon the readers' basic cognitive and intellectual skills, upon their background of cultural and intellectual experience and upon their language skills. Readers use their thinking and verbal reasoning skills to read for main ideas, for details, for organisation and for appreciation.

In traditional academic environments a successful comprehension is said to have been achieved if the reader can answer a question or restate any information given in the passage. However, in the contemporary academic milieu this concept of reading comprehension has been expanded to include recall, remembrance, application, inference and even the reader's knowledge of language, syntax and

vocabulary patterns. This knowledge may be categorised linguistically into different levels. First is a phonemic level where visual or acoustic input is recorded into basic speech sounds called phonemes. Second is a lexical level, which roughly corresponds to words or verbal patterns. Third is a syntactic level, which includes a set of rules that specify the process and methods of categories of word-groups. Fourth is a semantic level, which specifies the process and ways of sentence construction and the patterns of sentence structure. The meaning of a sentence is not simply the sum total of the lexical meaning of its constituent words but also involves the deeper layers of meanings that may exist beyond the superficial. Fifth is a pragmatic level, which corresponds to the use of the language in dialogues and social interaction.

Comprehension is then an interaction with the text on multiple levels, both linguistic and literary. It is a reader's response to a passage. It demonstrates his or her level of interaction and involvement with and interpretation of the comprehension passage. It leads to a holistic and integrated development of intelligence in an individual reader.

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### 3.3 TYPES OF READING COMPREHENSION

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Reading Comprehension is the ability to easily and efficiently read text for understanding meaning and making inter-connections between words and ideas, lexicon and syntax in a literary or linguistic passage. It is the last step of the reading process after the acquisition of phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. There are five categories of reading comprehension that may be taught in a language classroom. These are:

- Lexical Comprehension
- Literal Comprehension
- Interpretive Comprehension
- Applied Comprehension
- Affective Comprehension

These may be explained as:

**Lexical Comprehension** refers to understanding the key vocabulary in a text. The successful comprehension of a text depends on the activation of appropriate content and background knowledge. This in turn depends upon the reader's lexical knowledge. No comprehension is possible in any language unless the reader has a foreknowledge of the lexicon and also a basic understanding of syntactical patterns. If this is lacking then the reader will not be able to read accurately and appropriately and therefore the impetus of the passage will be lost. Since it will not have the desired impact upon the reader the essence of the exercise of the comprehension will be lost. Therefore, an awareness and knowledge of lexicon is fundamental to attaining skill in comprehension.

**Literal comprehension** involves two dimensions: chronological and surface understanding of the explicitly stated content details in a passage. It can include the perception and processing of factual information; the recall or recognition of main thematic ideas, detailed chronology of the sequence of occurrences and events, comparison of language and content, appearance and traits of character description, and the cause and effect relationship explicitly stated in a story may

be regarded as literal level comprehension tasks. Recall would require the reader to refer to and furnish an idea or ideas stated by the author, however recognition on the other hand would require the reader to decide whether or not a type specific information was presented in the story. Recall questions are usually more difficult to answer than recognition questions since recall requires the generation of the response after remembering what was read. In contrast questions of recognition require the reader to select a correct answer by recognizing it. The ability to comprehend literal information presented in a story leads to higher levels of understanding and appreciation and is thus important for the reader as a linguistic and literary skill. Literal understanding is thus the cornerstone of the comprehension skill as it enhances the reading and retention abilities of the reader. Reading without understanding is as futile as understanding without retention.

**Interpretative or Inferential Comprehension** is the process through which readers infer, analyse or interpret the meaning embedded and implied beyond explicitly stated information in the content. They understand the passage to arrive at a deeper understanding of the entire content. This process is similar to that of literal comprehension and involves the sequencing of main ideas, the understanding of chronological sequences as well as their application to the events in the narrative, details of actions, characterization and a complete understanding of the cause or underlying effect of an action by a character whose subtle traits are elucidated in his or her behaviour. This information is not explicitly stated and the reader must discern an underlying nuance of meaning by trying to “read between the lines” to comprehend at an inferential level.

In some instances of inferential or interpretative comprehension readers may be required to elaborate on ideas and in other instances in the contextual repertoire to concretize abstract ideas. These ideas must first be integrated and then used as a basis for making inferences. Inference thus requires an integration of the content of the passage which shall subsequently result in the creation of inferences about the passage for comprehension. It involves a combination of conjecture and explanation based on a synthesis of the literal context, personal knowledge, intention, and imagination. Inference can take the form of either convergent or divergent thinking. Convergent thinking is involved in such skills as identifying topic sentences, determining sequences and recalling details. Convergent inferences cause the reader to come to a specific correct answer or an agreed upon hypothesis that may be verified through the data supplied by the writer. Divergent thinking on the other hand is imaginative or creative thinking. It is an inference that does not have to be judged as right or wrong. In divergent thinking the individual develops alternative answer, none of which is necessarily correct but none of which is incorrect either. Divergent thinking is a synonym for creative thinking and convergent thinking can be considered a synonym of analytical thinking. In a nutshell then, one must understand that strategies of reading comprehension can encompass a variety of thought processes, multiple types of thinking and diverse ways of negotiating with the text.

**Applied Comprehension** refers to the application of the content in the passage to some idea or opinion stated externally. This involves understanding the meaning of the passage, making inferences, relating ideas logically and sequentially in the content, making external associations of ideas contained in the passage and answering questions which are not superficial but analytical. This may involve drawing comparison, making contrasts, highlighting sameness and discerning

differences. For instance, a study of a fairy tale involves the application of the lesson of the same to real life, the parallel of the situation to daily incidents and the moral of the subtext as a didactic lesson. Even a fable or an allegory when read with meticulous attention can bring about a realization of the fact that this can be applied to contemporary reality and is thus universal.

**Affective Comprehension** involves an understanding of the emotional and social aspects of the content of a literary passage and it happens when the readers have the ability to understand and establish a connection between motive and plot development. This shows the topicality and immediacy of the passage and the intensity and relational ability of the reader. For example, the characters in a novel may propel the narrative forward by their actions but in a short story the situations may impact a character to act in a specific way. Both plot and character are inter-related in a literary passage and thus the development of the latter is dependent on the progress and actions of the former. The moment this connective understanding and linking ability is manifested by the reader, the comprehension becomes affective in nature.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) How is comprehension dependent upon the readers? Explain.

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- 2) Briefly discuss the various linguistic levels of comprehension.

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- 3) State one major similarity between applied and affective comprehension.

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- 4) What is meant by “read between the lines” in comprehension?

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### 3.4 STRATEGIES OF READING COMPREHENSION

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Comprehension involves both intensive and extensive reading and these are dependent on several skills that may be classified as literal skills, interpretive skills, critical skills and creative skills. Literal skills are skills used for understanding the surface of content information; interpretive skills are skills that are needed to analyse the deeper meanings of the content, critical skills are skills needed to compare and contrast facts and details, cite and substantiate arguments related to the passage; creative skills are skills of summary, paraphrase, reproduction of facts by rewording and rewriting the content of the passage as well as extracting relevant portions and answering questions based on the content. These skills should be practiced together to achieve complete and holistic understanding of the content on a comprehension passage.

To enhance the skill of reading and understanding a literary passage, to analyse it thoroughly and also to submit and express parts of it as answers to be evaluated, there are five main strategies that should be adhered to. They are: framing content-based questions, creating content summary, visualising and predicting the development of the text, analysing the textual patterns and structures and finally scaffolding previous knowledge with new concepts. A detailed explanation of these is given below:

**Framing Content Based Questions:** Comprehensive learning in any literary and linguistic comprehension passage can occur only through self-directed questioning done by a reader before and after reading. It is the interrogative mode of understanding post reading that can deeply entrench the information of the content in the reader's mind. Questioning has multiple uses: it arouses curiosity, it embeds the learning within the mind, it also propels the exploration of deeper nuances in a text. Above all it serves as useful skill for pre-practice of evaluation. Framing questions mostly self-directed can thus be a useful way of examining the level of the reader's self-understanding of the text by an exercise by introspection.

Three types of questions must be framed for a better understanding of any passage. They are: direct or factual questions, analytical or interpretive questions, and research questions. A direct question is based on the data presented in the content of the passage and it highlights the outline details of the material read with *the facts being explicitly stated*. For example, in a fairy tale like *Cinderella* a direct question would refer to the details of the transformation of the pumpkin into a coach and the mice into liveried attendants. An analytical question makes the readers evaluate and seek deeper meanings in the outcomes of their learning and understanding. For instance, in the story of *Cinderella*, an analytical question would deal with the relevance of the story in contemporary society and would seek universal and topical relevance of the situation presented to a similar situation in human life in a particular culture. A research question encourages the readers to seek information beyond what is in the text. For example, in the story of *Cinderella*, the research question would be what the glass slipper in *Cinderella* symbolises. These types of questions taken together provide a technique for holistic and integrated understanding of a literary passage, or in this case a fairy tale. Such a technique proves effective because it generates self-interest and self-

motivation to obtain a better understanding of the text by imbibing the skills needed for the same.

**Creating Content Summary:** Summary is the ability to encapsulate the essence of a text in a limited number of words. It deletes irrelevant details, combines similar ideas, condenses main ideas, and connects major themes into concise statements that capture the purpose of reading for the reader. In any comprehension activity related to reading a literary passage a summary can be made by jotting down ideas and statements, underlining key words and phrases, mind mapping of the themes and sequence of actions, or even simply attempting a chronological arrangement of the key ideas so that a sequential understanding is achieved. For example, in the essay “Of Studies” by Francis Bacon, a summary would contain the following ideas: the purpose of studies, their use in daily life, their abuse or excess and their remedy of various diseases of the mind. Metaphors of pruning and other aphorisms and/or Latinate phrases may be deleted in the summary since they enhance the linguistic style of the essay and are not so integral to its meaning.

**Visualising and Prediction of Text:** The importance of visualizing the content of a text is immense as a strategy of reading comprehension. As they read the text, readers should be encouraged to form visual images in their mind as structural images or diagrams instead of mere pictures, as pictures have a tendency to fade. The ability to visualise is a key element of comprehension since pictorial retention aids understanding better than simply verbal or mnemonic aids. The structural images of textual progression will help readers retain, recall and even predict the future progress of thought and action of the text through conjecture and educated guesswork. For example, if the text of “The Lagoon” by Joseph Conrad is read slowly and closely, and if during the reading process the reader is able to form mental images of the Congo scenery and the forests depicted, the river journey can be easily visualised as a travel inward into the isle creek. Once this is done the reader will be able to see parallels in the river journey with the journey of life, with a voyage deep within the jungle as the voyage into the deep and dark sub-conscious of the human mind. The reader then will face little difficulty in making the symbolical analogy of the river journey within the forest to the journey of the human mind into the depths of its subconscious. Many symbols and many layers of meaning will be unravelled by visualisation and mind mapping of the text. Moreover, the reader will also understand how the White Man is a foil to the swarthy Arsat, how he serves as a trigger to Arsat’s realization, how even the setting of the island cut off from visible civilization is a symbol of Man’s existence in the world. Visualization will enable a reader to predict that Diamelen will eventually die and that her death will be a moment of epiphany for Arsat. It will enable the reader to understand the flashback better and also to relate the consequences of the flashback to the present point of crisis in the main story.

**Analysis of Textual Patterns and Structures:** There are many genres, styles, modes and techniques of narration by which writers organize their textual material. These can also be in the form of literary patterns or linguistic structures. The patterns used may be in the form of cause-effect pattern, problem-solution pattern, or a descriptive pattern. A cause-effect pattern can be a series of reasons or motives leading up to the climax of action or resolution of narrative. A problem solution pattern may present the argument or premise as a crisis or situation and then submit various alternative outcomes and solutions to the same. The descriptive

pattern is one in which the pros and cons of a situation are evaluated, described and assessed. Understanding the pattern through which the material is presented is essential for the reader in order to achieve complete comprehension of the information provided. It is important to understand and analyse the patterns of a text so that the reader can gauge if the purpose of the passage has been fulfilled. For instance, if one is reading a newspaper report or a journalistic article, it is imperative that one should note the different headings, sub-headings, captions and also study the tables, charts, or statistical data mentioned. Readers must also note the concise, pithy and balanced sentence structure and analytical content presented as substantiation, cause-effect or even narrative input. In any commercial report the data presented will be different from that presented in a newspaper report. Similarly, an article in a magazine will be different from an editorial in a newspaper. The tone of a scholarly discourse will be radically opposite to that of a subjective perspective on the same topic. Readers can plan their understanding better once they have discerned the textual pattern and structure of a text in a comprehension passage. For instance, the pattern of a fictional prose passage is very different from that of a non-fictional passage and both in turn are very different from that of a journalistic passage, a commercial report, a newspaper article, a blog or a review.

**Scaffolding Old Knowledge with New Concepts:** Brainstorming is vital for reading and understanding any passage on any topic. It serves to stimulate a reader's previous knowledge of the ideas contained in the passage given for comprehension. A memory of a similar text, if activated, will make the readers understand better and deeper. This will help them connect the present content being read to their already existing knowledge and make the new reading more stimulating and engaging. The strategy allows readers to work their way up from an already existing schema, instead of starting a new one. Thus, it is useful to activate prior knowledge and use it to support the embedded structures of knowledge within the reader thereby creating a support for the new knowledge to be acquired through fresh comprehension and new reading. For instance, in any passage related to environmental studies, one can always activate prior knowledge of biology, geography and maybe even economics as a means of reading deeply into the passage given. Thus, even before one has started reading the passage, one is aware of embedded knowledge about pollution, energy, economic policies, geographical changes and other minute details that may have a bearing upon the topic of environmental studies given for reading. This will be the scaffold or embedded support of the new knowledge of the details given in the content of the main passage. Thus, on the sub-structure of prior knowledge the superstructure of new knowledge and understanding will be built and the finished intellectual edifice will be strong and deep-seated.

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### **3.5 SKILLS FOR READING COMPREHENSION**

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Reading Comprehension is a skill that may be innate but can also be acquired through various strategies imbibed in the course of reading and polished with continuous practice. The acquisition of reading comprehension skills has myriad importance in academic and personal life and mastery over this skill can be attained through various practices like decoding, fluency, vocabulary enhancement and sentence construction, retention and attention span development among many others.



- **Decoding words:** Decoding is a vital step in the reading process and this skill is employed to understand words which a reader may have heard before but never read or spelt. This is the first step of comprehension. The ability to express and understand words which are unfamiliar or only partly familiar is the basis for other reading skills. Decoding is inextricably interlinked with phonemic awareness (which is a subset of a broader skill called phonological awareness). Phonemic awareness enables readers to hear individual sounds in words (known as phonemes) as well as to enable them to combine different phonemes into creating new words. Decoding also involves the skill of connecting individual sounds to letters. Words can only be pronounced and then spelt correctly if the reader has made a connection between a letter, or group of letters, and the sounds they typically make.
- **Fluency in reading:** Fluency involves the immediate recognition of sounds and words, which may be either familiar or unfamiliar to the reader. Fluency accelerates the pace at which readers can read and understand the text. Decoding every word may be both tedious and time-consuming and this is where the sub-skill set of word recognition is used for immediate recognition of complete words by silent reading instead of sounding them out. Fluent readers can read smoothly and swiftly, skimming and scanning for words and understanding meaning in the content as they read. They group words together to aid in the understanding of the meaning, and they use the appropriate diction and tone of their voice when reading aloud. Reading fluency is one of the most essential skills for accuracy in reading comprehension. The understanding of the content depends largely on the ability to read with fluency and speed.
- **Building Vocabulary:** A key skill component of reading comprehension is acquiring a wide-ranging and diverse vocabulary. Readers may acquire vocabulary through classroom instruction, everyday experience and also by reading. The enrichment of vocabulary especially by exposing a reader to multiple contexts, having frequent conversations, playing word-games, and giving readers explicit instructions of a specialised nature in a direct way in the classroom can enhance the skills of reading comprehension. Vocabulary building must be regarded as an aggregate skill of reading comprehension. The repertoire of words used by a reader or familiar to a reader may be augmented by words in the passage for comprehension and the only way to understand these words and append them to the readers' vocabulary is by situating the meaning in context and then adding the word to their personal repertoire for future use. Here also retention and recall play an important role.
- **Sentence Construction and Arrangement:** Sentence construction is primarily a writing skill and in any skill of reading comprehension, this is closely integrated with a fundamental reading skill called cohesion which helps the readers identify the format and clarify the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. This is an essential and vital skill of reading comprehension called cohesion and coherence, i.e. the ability of the reader to understand the structure, order and pattern of a sentence and create a sentence similarly by linking the ideas of a comprehension passage. This skill can be acquired by achieving explicit classroom instruction on the same and can be

elucidated in the connection of ideas in the content of a passage. To imbibe this skill the reader must keep an analytical and objective outlook towards the content of the passage while reading and also maintain sufficient detachment to form multiple perspectives on the content of the passage. An unprejudiced and clear approach towards the text can always be used to strengthen this skill of reading comprehension.

- **Reasoning and Background Knowledge:** Background knowledge is a must for a better understanding of the comprehension passage. Reading becomes easier with familiarity of the topic and the same can be achieved by foreknowledge or familiarity of the topic and its contextual background. Before reading a passage, one must activate background knowledge that may be embedded within the mind about the topic of the passage. This multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to the text will enhance the holistic understanding of the passage through scaffolding of knowledge.
- **Retention Span and Attention Span:** These two skills are both subsets of the larger activity set called executive function. Retention span is the duration of the time period in which the reader can remember the vital and key details of the passage after one complete reading of the passage. These details may be factual, sequential, chronological, descriptive, linguistic etc. Attention span is the meticulousness with which the readers read the passage and the details they remember during the course of their reading. While reading, the attention span of readers will allow them to process and grasp information from the text whereas retention span allows them to retain, recall and even reuse that information to gain meaning and build knowledge from what they are reading. The ability to self-monitor while reading a passage is connected to the retention and memory span of a reader. Examples of comprehension skills that can be taught and applied to all reading situations include summarizing, sequencing, inferencing, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, self-questioning, problem-solving, relating background knowledge, distinguishing between fact and opinion, finding the main idea, important facts, and supporting details and substantiating them. These skills are particularly important for comprehending what is generally known as information reading or expository reading.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Briefly discuss the three types of questions a reader can frame and give a textual example of each.

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- 2) Explain what is meant by scaffolding of knowledge.

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- 3) How does reading become easier with familiarity of the topic?

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- 4) Differentiate between attention span and memory span in reading comprehension.

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### **3.6 ACADEMIC READING AND KNOWLEDGE IN COMPREHENSION**

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Academic reading has different purposes depending upon the nature of the passage and the type of comprehension it requires. The varieties of academic reading are diverse and may include the purposes of obtaining data and information, understanding ideas and arguments, discovering the authorial perspectives and mode of narration, seeking evidence of their own perspectives, formation of new perspectives, understanding and knowledge, forming personal ideas and opinions as well as building a wider linguistic repertoire. There are various strategies of reading a text and these may range from prediction, skimming, scanning, defining the contrast between factual and non-factual information, important and unimportant items, relevant and irrelevant details, explicit and implicit realizations, ideas, examples and opinions. The other purposes of academic reading may include drawing inferences and conclusions, deducing unknown words, understanding graphic presentation and pictorial representation, understanding text organisation especially linguistic and semantic aspects like relationships between and within sentences. There are four main reading approaches to the various types of comprehension passages and these are psychological, content-oriented, linguistic and pedagogically-oriented. The

psychological approach focuses on what takes place in the mind of the reader as he or she reads the passage and negotiates the meanings and the semantic patterns as well as syntactical structures and lexicon. The content-oriented approach focuses on extraction of information by readers provided they are given a comprehension passage in accordance with their aptitude and experience. The linguistic approach focuses on word and sentences in the passage, genre, style, rhetoric and the semantic and syntactic patterns with lexical significance. The pedagogically-oriented is focused on the implementation of learning theories which enable readers to work at their own pace so that reading becomes a self-controlled, self-directed and introspective exercise.

There are six types of knowledge in a comprehension passage which enable a reader to understand the text. They may be classified into: general, generic, morphological, sociocultural, syntactic and topical. General knowledge refers to the knowledge of the circumstances in which the text was written and the content it may have in it. Generic knowledge refers to the knowledge of the type, nature and stylistic pattern of the text being highlighted through its content. Morphological knowledge refers to the knowledge of a relationship between a word and its structures such as affixes and derivatives. Socio-cultural knowledge refers to the knowledge of the overall idea of the content described in the text and its social implications and / or any cultural stereotypes it may elaborate. Syntactic knowledge refers to the knowledge of grammar and semantic patterns in a text. Topical knowledge is the knowledge of the details of the text and its relation with contemporary reality.

These categories of knowledge may be achieved by the various ways of reading a comprehension passage such as receptive reading, reflective reading, skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading. Receptive reading is done for enjoyment by a reader usually in a passage of prose fiction. Reflective reading is done when a reader reads certain positions in a text and then pauses to reflect, recall or revise a line of fact or explore a line of argument or to arrive at a changed perspective. Skimming reading refers to a rapid cursory glance through the text with an intention to search for specific dates, skipping large chunks of information and focusing on select highlights in the text. Scanning involves searching rapidly through a text to find some specific data to which attention has been sought or directed. Intensive reading is a careful appreciation of theme, tone, language, syntax, vocabulary to understand the explicit and implicit connotations in a text.

In *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press, 2000) a procedure called SCROL is elaborated as a technique of reading for comprehension. This is aimed at using texts to help understand, remember and locate information using heading segments and introductory paragraphs or text portions of a passage. The SCROL Process of Comprehension involves the following steps: survey, connect, read, outline and look back.

S- Survey the headings and sub-headings of a comprehension passage and then activate prior knowledge of the subject within oneself.

C- Connect the key words in the first portion or paragraph or lines (if the passage contains more than two paragraphs) to make relational associations between them and also to connect them to the title or heading and sub-heading.

R- Read by returning to each heading or segment or portion and mark words, phrases, jargon, terms that may express some important information, fact, opinion or even argument.

O- Outline the major ideas in the segments to reflect on structure, perspective and other relevant details.

L- Look Back and check for inaccuracy in recording and noting details and relate the same to the outline.

**Check Your Progress 3**

1) Which are the skills important for Expository Reading and why?

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2) What are the various strategies of reading a text?

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3) Explain the various types of knowledge that help a reader to understand a text.

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4) Read the sample Comprehension Passage below and answer the Questions in the end in your own words as briefly as possible, for practice.

Philosophy of Education is a label applied to the study of the purpose, process, nature and ideals of education. It can be considered a branch of both philosophy and education. Education can be defined as the teaching and learning of specific skills, and the imparting of knowledge, judgment and wisdom, and is something broader than the societal institution of education we often speak of.

Many educationalists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful. But

philosophers dating back to Plato and the Ancient Greeks have given the area much thought and emphasis, and there is little doubt that their work has helped shape the practice of education over the millennia.

Plato is the earliest important educational thinker, and education is an essential element in “The Republic” (his most important work on philosophy and political theory, written around 360 B.C.). In it, he advocates some rather extreme methods: removing children from their mothers’ care and raising them as wards of the state, and differentiating children suitable to the various castes, the highest receiving the most education, so that they could act as guardians of the city and care for the less able. He believed that education should be holistic, including facts, skills, physical discipline, music and art. Plato believed that talent and intelligence is not distributed genetically and thus is to be found in children born to all classes, although his proposed system of selective public education for an educated minority of the population does not really follow a democratic model.

Aristotle considered human nature, habit and reason to be equally important forces to be cultivated in education, the ultimate aim of which should be to produce good and virtuous citizens. He proposed that teachers lead their students systematically, and that repetition be used as a key tool to develop good habits, unlike Socrates’ emphasis on questioning his listeners to bring out their own ideas. He emphasized the balancing of the theoretical and practical aspects of subjects taught, among which he explicitly mentions reading, writing, mathematics, music, physical education, literature, history, and a wide range of sciences, as well as play, which he also considered important.

During the Medieval period, the idea of Perennialism was first formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in his work “De Magistro”. Perennialism holds that one should teach those things deemed to be of everlasting importance to all people everywhere, namely principles and reasoning, not just facts (which are apt to change over time), and that one should teach first about people, not machines or techniques. It was originally religious in nature, and it was only much later that a theory of secular perennialism developed.

Answer these questions:

- a) What is Philosophy of Education used to refer to?

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- b) What extreme methods does Plato advocate?

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c) According to Aristotle what was the ultimate aim of education?

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d) What is Perennialism and how did it develop?

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### 3.7 LET US SUM UP

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Reading Comprehension should aim to build the specific linguistic ability to engage in purposeful reading, to adopt a range of literary styles necessary for interacting successfully with authentic texts to develop critical awareness. This implies that comprehension must be used to develop and enhance competence in the English Language with an awareness of the structure of written texts, and overall knowledge in general about the world. It also aims at developing confidence by using comprehension to create meaning from a text. Both competence and confidence in the didactic environment of a controlled classroom can be supportive and persuasive enough to instill in the reader-cum-learner a desire for attaining mastery in English through reading comprehension.

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### 3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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If you would like to learn more reading comprehension strategies, you may consult:

Camille Blachowicz & Donna Ogle, *Reading Comprehension: Strategies for Independent Learners Second Edition* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008)

Danielle S. McNamara (ed.), *Reading Comprehension Strategies: Theories, Interventions, and Technologies* (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

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## 3.9 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

For answers to 1 & 2, refer to 3.2.

For answers to 3 & 4, refer to 3.3.

### Check Your Progress 2

For answers to 1 & 2, refer to 3.4.

For answers to 3 & 4, refer to 3.5.

### Check Your Progress 3

For answers to 1, 2 & 3, refer to 3.6.

For answers to questions at the end of 4, refer to the passage in 4.



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## UNIT 4 READING A LITERARY TEXT

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Warm up
- 4.2 Structures and Tactics for Classroom Reading of Literary texts
- 4.3 Developing Awareness for Effective Reading
- 4.4 Developing Efficacy in Reading
- 4.5 The Process of Reading Literary Texts
- 4.6 Developing Literary Reading Ability
- 4.7 Reading a Literary Text: Prose
- 4.8 Reading a Literary Text: Poetry
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Suggested Readings
- 4.11 Answers

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit aims to develop in the learner the ability to:

- understand the aspects of instructional design involved in the reading of a literary text written in the English Language;
- develop a thorough understanding of the process of reading in the heterogeneous modern classroom of today;
- understand the reading process as well as the strategies of developing reading awareness for effective reading of literary texts in tutor-mediated situations;
- interact with the academic content of literary texts by developing efficacy in reading;
- apply the skills and strategies of reading to various forms of literary texts and types of literary content by achieving reading readiness.

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### 4.1 WARM UP

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Answer the following questions based on your own opinion and experience:

- What do you understand by a literary text?
- Do you like reading literature? If so what type of literature matches your interest?
- What is your focus when you read a literary prose text? Do you pay more attention to plot, character or dialogue?
- What type of poems do you prefer and why: ballad, elegies, sonnets, limericks, nonsense verse etc.?
- What is your favourite literary work and why?

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## 4.2 STRUCTURES AND TACTICS FOR CLASSROOM READING OF LITERARY TEXTS

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In any English language classroom, reading becomes a primary activity for the acquisition of both knowledge and comprehension of the textual content prescribed in the syllabi. A very important way in which reading can be implemented in the classroom is through establishing and executing a specific kind of instructional design or technique. This can reinforce the relevance of reading in the classroom and make it a habit for later personal life. Instructional design for reading a literary text involves two aspects that are inextricably intertwined with each other and together can redefine the teaching of language in any cultural context. These are known as structures and tactics. Together they play a vital role in reading and learning.

Structures involve the “what” or the nature of the reading and address mainly the focus of the literary content to be read and learnt; the questions or problems addressed in the text; the formative and fundamental concepts highlighted; the volume of data and information that the readers need to access; the perspective or frame of reference that they need to develop in contrast or complement to the author’s perspective and concept of the text; the overall plan required by the reader to adopt and implement; the self-expectations and self-requirements of the readers as well as the parameters and rubrics of evaluation in a classroom situation which has envisaged and specified learning outcomes. Tactics involve the “how” or the methodology of the reading and may include the readers’ plan of reading so as to achieve the active engagement of their minds; their accomplishment and development of insights, comprehension, knowledge, and the critical cum analytical ability that is vital for readers in the advanced stage; the way in which they will express their answers and pave a way to creating questions in the focal area of the literary context prescribed for reading.

The students in a language classroom with an overt emphasis on literary reading must know from the beginning what in general is going to be happening in the course, how they are going to be evaluated, what methodology of reading will be adopted and what they should be striving to achieve. The aim of the literary text and the way of reading it should be carefully elaborated by the tutor at the study centre. It is useful for the tutor to introspect within and conclude as to what kind of reasoning is going to be central to reading and interpreting the literary content (historical, literary, stylistic etc.). The tutors’ decisions made about the structure and tactics of the courses should be a result of their concept of the course and it must be one of their most fundamental objectives in teaching the course.

Once the tutors have understood and chalked out the most basic structure (and sub-structures) of their reading style, they must focus on the strategies they will use to implement that structure effectively, to enable that structure to be completely and successfully achieved. They can divide their techniques and tactics into two different strategies. The first strategy is a combination of daily tactics (how they will read every day) and episodic tactics (how they will read intermittently and periodically). The second strategy is to divide tactics into two categories: complex and simple. Most simple tactics comprise ways of motivating shy and diffident students who do not volunteer to read, answer and participate in a discussion; persuading those students to summarize what other students have read and

narrated, encouraging those students to articulate the purpose of an assignment or to express the question in the classroom: these are rather easy to apply and can be time-saving as well as attention garnering. On the other hand, complex tactics like teaching students how to read critically, creating an oral test rubric, developing parameters and techniques for self-assessment of the student are more elaborate. As these complex strategies have multiple parts and often require an extended period of time to be executed, they are generally more difficult to implement.

Thus, instructional design in a reading lesson requires the choices a tutor makes while thinking about instruction in both structural and tactical ways. Overall structural thinking, for example, about the concept for the course, can help free a tutor from the didactic model of instruction into which they may have been conditioned and this can also eliminate the ineffective teaching that invariably and frequently happens through one-sided lecturing after or during reading a text in a classroom. Simple and complex tactical thinking can provide the means by which teachers can follow through on their structural decisions in an effective way. Teaching will not be transformed simply because teachers philosophically believe in the value of critical thinking. They must find practical ways to bring it into instruction, both structurally and tactically.

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### 4.3 DEVELOPING AWARENESS FOR EFFECTIVE READING

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There are several faulty assumptions that contribute to ineffective reading of a literary text. Some of them are explained below:

- Knowledge ensures better reading: Knowledge of literary content is vital but adequate knowledge does not guarantee effective reading. It is practice which makes reading perfect, and focus on developing that practice is usually at the expense of the belief that “since I know, thus I can read.” The result is that the term “knowledgeable reader” can be attributed to a very small group and many remain frustrated in their attempts to communicate openly and effectively about their reading. Thus, one must never read with overconfidence in one’s prior knowledge of the text.
- Good readers are born not made: Research has clearly stated the salient dimensions of effective reading. These are skills that are not necessarily innate and may be skilfully acquired with persistent practice. The individual differences between readers may make it simpler for some to acquire certain skills in comparison to others as is the case in acquiring knowledge of content. Thus no one is born a reader although one may have an innate penchant for reading. The hobby and habit of reading can be honed and perfected only by repeated practice and greater exposure to books.
- Readers must focus on only content-based meaning and not the subtler and deeper nuances: This assumption is erroneous and flawed as it highlights the text and not the individual. It is equivalent to the view that the prescribed reading texts are important but the readers’ interpretation of them is not. In this case one must remember that content is both fluid and dynamic; it can transform with transforming curriculum and subjective experiences of life. It can evolve and accumulate rapidly, and when readers try to include more content in their experience, they quickly exhaust the

capacity of such an endeavour. What they need to do is read gradually and intently to analyse, evaluate, criticise and collaborate with others to create new knowledge or find layers and nuances of interpretation beyond the superficial realm of facts and assertions. Readers must explore content not as an end but as the means by which larger objectives can be accomplished. Reading effectively includes an understanding of both superficial meaning and embedded meaning.

A lack of efficacy on the part of a reader leads to a narrow repertoire of instructional techniques and practices, and the inability to adjust to changes in pedagogical contexts and demands. On the other hand, introspecting on one's own reading practice, adding to one's repertoire, and focusing on learning helps readers discover value in their reading of a literary text.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) What are two faulty assumptions that contribute to ineffective reading of a literary text?

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- 2) What does a lack of efficacy on the part of a reader lead to?

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- 3) How must readers explore content?

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- 4) How can readers go beyond the superficial realm of facts and assertions while reading? Explain.

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## 4.4 DEVELOPING EFFICACY IN READING

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There are various graded steps that should be meticulously followed to improve the efficacy of reading a literary text:

- **Analysing the need for reading awareness:** Before reading a literary text, one must introspect to analyse the need and purpose of reading that text; the strategies one will use in and out of the classroom for reading that text and how they will structure their reading in different ways.
- **Establishing learning parameters for reading:** One must introspect further to analyse the extent of content mastery readers need to achieve and why; what specific skills do they need to acquire and why; how will the readers ascertain if they have achieved the mastery of content and acquired the specific skills. These questions can trigger the need for the reader to establish learning parameters independently and autonomously.
- **Choice of Amendments:** The reader in the classroom must recognise the need for variety and how it must be implemented in the ambit of their reading. This can be done by trying to begin by changing reading strategies and practices that are in conflict with the literary content or the instructional setting or that do not lead to the learning parameters and the learning outcomes envisaged for the reading of textual content.
- **Implementing the changes:** Changes in reading style and strategy as well as the variety of texts for reading must be made in small ways and implemented slowly and gradually by the tutor and then by the reader. A rationale must be projected for each part of the reading assignments and assessment in the classroom situation so that the readers will better understand why they are reading or completing a project and what the parameters of their assessment are.
- **Establishing cognitive outcomes and objectives:** Cognitive outcomes and objectives include parameters of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
- **Knowledge** requires memorizing facts, definitions, etc. and this requires superficial understanding of the literary text.
- **Comprehension** requires understanding material of the literary text and demands that the learner explain the content lucidly and cogently.
- **Application** requires using abstract ideas in concrete situations and it demands that students manifest the ability to solve simple problems that may emerge while reading the literary text.
- **Analysis** refers to the process of breaking down an idea into its individual components in the course of the reading of a literary text.
- **Synthesis** refers to the process of combining of multiple parts of literary content or linguistic inputs to create a new holistic and integrated content and this can lead to research, creativity and open-ended interpretations of the literary text.

- Evaluation involves making a performance-based assessment and articulating the criteria for that assessment after the reading of the literary text.

Setting clear objectives for each topic in the reading activity of literary texts will help clarify for students why and how they are being asked to perform certain tasks after intensive reading.

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## 4.5 THE PROCESS OF READING LITERARY TEXTS

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The process of reading a literary text can be essentially divided into three stages. They are: the recognition stage, the structuring stage and the interpretation stage.

- The recognition stage is one where the reader simply recognizes the graphic counterparts of the phonological items. Here the reader recognizes the spoken words in their written form and associates accurately the sounds corresponding with the alphabet combinations or words and phrases.
- The structuring stage is one where the reader sees the syntactic relationships of the items and understands the structural meaning of the syntactic units in a block of the literary text.
- The interpretation stage is the highest level in the process of reading. It is the stage where the reader can grasp the importance of a word, a phrase, or a sentence, and can see beyond superficial connotations to an inner meaning or the implication of a statement. This is the ultimate goal to be, attained in the process of reading.

Reading is of two kinds: intensive and extensive. Intensive reading is a way of closely reading a text for accuracy and should ideally be done under the supervision of the teacher. It compels the learners to pay particular attention to the text, content, stylistic features, tone and structure of the text. It involves the profound and detailed understanding of the text. It is primarily concerned with the developing of the following reading and comprehension strategies, viz., judgement, reasoning, interpretation, appreciation. Intensive reading is more an exercise in accuracy. Readers who are practicing this kind of reading do not read a text only for a specific purpose of information but also to assess and analyse the impact on the reader of a writer's intentions, arguments, ideas, style, etc.

Extensive reading or reading for fluency involves reading of longer texts for pleasure and it may be both speedy and cursory. It may not notice and examine the finer points of the writing and the minute details. It is a leisurely and independent activity in which the reader is the autonomous reader not guided by any scholarly mentor or expert. Readers who practice this kind of reading may read independently and autonomously and be self-paced. This is also called rapid reading or independent silent reading. The specific objectives of extensive reading are to understand the meaning at a cursory glance, to increase passive vocabulary, to develop a taste for reading, to develop the habit of reading for pleasure, to concentrate upon literary content rather than literary form. The term extensive reading means to read silently and quickly and trains the reader to understand the subject matter efficiently. It plays a vital role in the learning of second or

foreign language. In a classroom situation, the students are made to read as much as possible and the reading texts selected for them or by them are within the linguistic competence of the reader. There are hardly any follow up activities that demand academic engagement with the text and so this creates interest among the learners. They learn to read faster without any external hindrance or fear of consequences.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Discuss three graded steps that should be meticulously followed to improve the efficacy of reading a literary text.

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- 2) What is the difference between analysis and synthesis with reference to the cognitive outcomes of reading?

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- 3) What does silent reading play a vital role in?

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- 4) Briefly discuss the three main stages of reading.

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## 4.6 DEVELOPING LITERARY READING ABILITY

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Any holistic understanding of a literary text depends upon how thoroughly it is read. It may be read with a superficial comprehension or an in-depth comprehension. Reading is a complex skill, which involves a number of operations which may occur or proceed simultaneously. A reader who has acquired the skills of comprehending literary matter will invariably have the ability to:

- Read a passage at an average or normal speed accepted as the norm in that level of education.
- Understand the structured and lexical meanings of the words, phrases and sentences used in the passage.
- Read aloud, with correct pronunciation, accent, stress and intonation.
- Make an accurate conjecture about the meaning of an unknown word from the context in which it is used.
- Consult a dictionary to find out the meaning of an unfamiliar word if contextual conjecture is elusive.
- Find the required information by skimming through the entire page of a literature passage.
- Read silently without moving the lips and have a balanced eye movement while reading and enable retention at the same rate.
- Identify the key sentence of the entire literary passage and of every paragraph.
- Make a summary of the important points of the passage after reading and comprehension.
- Examine the text from the writer's point of view and infer the mood, opinion, style and focus of the writer.
- Identify the technicalities of writing such as punctuation, paragraph indentation, sentence structure, syntax patterns etc.
- Identify and analyse the appropriateness of the figures of speech used by the writer and illustrate their efficacy in enhancing the content or detracting from it.

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## 4.7 READING A LITERARY TEXT: PROSE

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A literary prose text is a work of literature expressed in the ordinary grammatical structure and natural flow of language rather than rhythmic structure as applied in traditional poetry. The simplicity and flexibility of the structure of literary prose has led to its use in spoken dialogue, factual discourse as well as topical and fictional writing. It is commonly used in literature, newspapers, magazines, encyclopedias, broadcasting, film, history, philosophy, law and many other forms of communication. Prose literature is usually contained in text books written according to the structural approach, graded with each lesson elaborating



paradigms and patterns of vocabulary and structure. Literary prose passages must be read with a primary purpose of learning the language and understanding the main idea. Thus, the way to progress in the literary reading of a prose passage is to read with comprehension as this enables the readers to acquire new vocabulary and discern language patterns used. Reading literary prose enables the readers to understand the passage, to read fluently, to enrich their vocabulary and to acquire and acknowledge a multiplicity of perspectives.

Effective prose reading strategies may require the fragmentation of a prose passage into smaller sections for better understanding. This fragmentation or breaking up of the text allows for multiple close readings to ensure that students involve their own thinking in the text as they read. Repeated reading helps to enhance comprehension and familiarize the reader with an author's style of writing. Methods of reading prose may also include organizing and facilitating group discussions where readers share their subjective impressions about the reading. The entire group thus benefits from being exposed to a multiplicity of reader responses and perspectives in a group discussion.

If one reads the essay "Of Studies" by Francis Bacon, one can see that it is one of the best specimens of literary non-fictional prose. The process to read this is very elaborate. A cursory reading of this must be followed by a deep and close reading done several times. Repeated reading will evoke keener observation of the nuances of interpretation that may have been missed the first time. The readers must employ active reading strategies at the beginning of the essay. First they must observe what is on the page – the facts, the pithy sentences, the punctuation breaks and the tripartite structure of each idea. Then they should pay close attention to patterns, connections, repetition or contradictions. Eventually they must discover the theme of the text – what the author intended for the reader to understand. Thereafter they can arrive at their own analysis of the elements of the literary text.

An example of a literary fictional prose text may be the short story by Katherine Mansfield called "The Fly". This must also be read multiple times to gain familiarity with the text, authorial style and mode of narration. Thereafter the readers will find answers to both literal and inferential questions that they may ask themselves while reading, viz., "who, what, when, where, and how." Readers may then progress to understand everything and realise that a situation or item would not be in the text if there was no reason for it. Finally, the readers will arrive at an understanding of the main theme and the various layers of meaning or what the author intended for the reader to understand. At the beginning of the reading process however, the readers must inculcate in themselves the knowledge of literary terminology such as elements of fiction, e.g., point of view, character, setting, plot, structure and theme, and why writers use them. This may be done in a study centre teaching situation or through self-learning materials available.

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## **4.8 READING A LITERARY TEXT: POETRY**

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There is a specific way of reading a poetic text to interpret it at various levels while reading. Readers of poetry begin by close reading, or line by line reading of a poem. In this situation literary theory is not applied at all. A comprehensive pattern which is indicative and representative of the repertoire of techniques that readers may summon is explained thus:

- Readers first and foremost read the surface meaning of the prescribed poem meticulously and accurately. In doing this they recognize the importance of the precise literal words of the text and do not take liberties with them. For example, “Sonnet 18” by William Shakespeare discussed contains the line “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May.” This is not only a direct allusion to the loveliness of Spring but also a reminder of the harshness of nature in summer which is a season of un-moderated extremes.
- Readers can then go on to identify stages and phases within a literary work. Some of these are formally marked by divisions like stanzas, quatrains, cantos or verses. Across these, there is a moment when the exposition-phase slides into the development-phase, and another phase begins when the development has put everything in place for the dénouement or the conclusion. The reader needs to be aware of the moment when the introduction of setting and characters pivots into the first significant incident, or choice, or denial. For example, in William Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 73”, it is important to decide whether the three images of aging are meant to represent some kind of progression and development or just three static examples of the same thing.
- Readers then read to discern an overall structural pattern or the scaffolding of a structural frame. These can be called macro-patterns to distinguish them from the smaller-scale or micro patterning. For example, two elements in a poem may be paired and contrasted throughout. The contrast may be supported by image-patterns linked to each for example “The Lamb” and “The Tyger”, taken respectively from William Blake’s poetic anthologies called *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Once the structural pattern has been perceived, a multi-layered interpretation can be discovered. After discovering the over-arching structural patterns readers can progress to identifying micro-patterns, such as a series of words with the same tone, or register, or flavour. Often the significant point is where the perceived pattern is broken, for the subject specified or articulated must have been chosen either in spite of breaking the pattern or is thereby foregrounded because it breaks the pattern.
- Readers can then progress to read minutely to discern the similarity beneath the apparent contrast, or vice-versa. The two elements or subjects such as the tiger and the lamb in Blake’s poems may be presented at first as the opposites of each other, but a close reading shows that what at first seemed true is actually untrue and they are opposites but not in the way that first appeared. They may be seen as complementary and contrasting but not diametrical opposites.
- Readers can be further led while reading to also distinguish between overt and covert meaning or between apparent content and real content. The superficial and most obvious meaning should be read first and then focus on the innermost and multi-layered implications of the content. This can be applied to the epic simile of Satan being compared to the Leviathan in Book I of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. The overt similarity is that of gigantic size but the covert meaning hints to a deeper similarity of the treacherous nature of both the creatures.

- Readers of a poem develop a sensitivity towards distinguishing between meaning and significance. Meaning is the essence contained within the work, whereas significance is the perspective or impression the readers perceive in the literary text, something which is necessarily fluid and shifting. Significance may alter with thought, analysis and perspectives e.g. the same thing can be understood differently by different classes or genders. This can be seen in the dichotomy of the surface meaning of seasonal aspects and ripe sensuousness of autumn in “To Autumn” by John Keats which actually articulates a deeper significance of poignant mortality.
- Readers of poetry often read the poem in terms of genre or literary type and interrogate the ways in which the literary genre affects the content of the work. For example, readers will be aware while reading of how the ballad form intensifies the content of “Lochinvar” by Walter Scott or “The Inchcape Rock” by Robert Southey or how the sonnet framework enhances the significance of the content of “How Do I Love Thee” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning or how the dramatic monologue adds dimension to the characterization in “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning.
- Readers also frequently read the literal as metaphorical while reading poems. For example, in Ted Hughes’ poem “Hawk Roosting”, the poet depicts a hawk roosting and this is implicitly articulated to symbolize power, position, supremacy and callous disregard for the lesser creatures. This kind of interpretation is very common in the reading of poetry.
- Readers also read with a keen and careful awareness of semantic association and word order. For instance, in the poem by Nissim Ezekiel titled “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.”, there are highly amusing Indianized errors of grammar and expression showing the colloquial and regional use of adapted English and making the reader both laugh and at the same time identify and understand the incorrectness of the language used. This leads us to realise that readers read a literary poetic text with a keen awareness of the changes in the meanings of words. These are some of the main ways in which readers and critics engage with literary texts and begin to analyse the poems and interpret them. Thus, we must acknowledge that readers will always need these elements of interpretation.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) What does any linguistic understanding of literature depend upon?

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2) State five major abilities of a skilled reader.

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3) Give one example of how readers identify stages and phases within a literary work.

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4) How can readers of a poem distinguish between meaning and significance?

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## 4.9 LET US SUM UP

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**Reading a literary text can be done by various strategies and activities structured to achieve effective reading. It can differ according to different genres and types of texts.**

- A significant way in which reading can be implemented in classroom situations is through structures and tactics. This can highlight the relevance of reading and inculcate it as a habit.
- A reader’s inefficacy results in a limited repertoire of reading skills and comprehension abilities, leading to the inability to adapt to the changes in academic contexts and demands. On the other hand, reflecting on one’s own reading, annexing one’s repertoire and improving the quality of interpretation help readers discover value in their reading of a literary text.
- Any holistic understanding of a literary text is linked to how earnestly it is read. It can be read superficially without in-depth analysis or intricately with detailed exploration.

- Reading a literary text involves several graded and procedural steps and must eventually seek a clear understanding of authorial content and perspective while at the same time generating a multiplicity of reader responses.

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## 4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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If you would like to learn more about the nuances of reading a literary text, you may consult:

Dennis J. Sumara, *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters: Imagination, Interpretation, Insight* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002)

Meg Morgan, Kim Stallings & Julie Townsend (ed.), *Strategies for Reading and Arguing About Literature* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007)

Phil Davis, *Reading and the Reader: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

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## 4.11 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

For all answers refer to 4.3.

### Check Your Progress 2

For answers to 1 & 2, refer to 4.4.

For answers to 3 & 4, refer to 4.5.

### Check Your Progress 3

For answers to 1 & 2, refer to 4.6.

For answers to 3 & 4, refer to 4.8.