The Longman Guide to Graded Reading

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Contents

1 Introduction – Graded readers and extensive reading

Learners who read widely achieve greater fluency in English, and gain confidence and pleasure in learning the language. Comprehension, in all its forms, is now widely recognised as a key process in acquiring language.

Graded readers today are of such variety and quality that more and more teachers are keen to use them. The question is always how? The purpose of this book is to offer teachers practical advice and suggestions for including reading in their language programmes.

The book has been compiled by practising teachers and teacher trainers from their own ideas, and from ideas which have come from teachers in a number of different countries and types of schools and colleges.

If you wish to read further on the subject of reading, there is an extensive bibliography at the end of this book.

What are graded readers?

Graded readers are books, both fiction and non-fiction. Their language is controlled so that it matches the language competence of the learners reading them. This is achieved in various ways. Most obviously the vocabulary load can be restricted. Learners must learn to guess the meaning of new words, but they can only do this if the density of new words is kept low. Language structures can similarly be controlled so that learners are exposed only to those structures they are likely to be familiar with at their stage of language learning.

There are less obvious but equally important factors. The amount of information in graded readers is controlled, not because the reader is thought stupid, but because this compensates for the difficulty of absorbing information in a foreign language. This means for example that the narrative technique of the text is kept simple, references to cultural background explained, complex sub-plots avoided. Another factor is the use of photos and illustrations, perhaps with captions, to support the text. The position of these in relation to the text as well as of course the clarity of design of the book can do much to aid comprehension.

In these ways, the learners have an experience of reading which is close to their experience of extensive reading in their mother tongue – without constant reference to a dictionary or the frequent need to re-read certain passages in order to understand them.

How do graded readers help learners?

Graded readers help learners in three ways – first by providing language practice, secondly by giving language extension and thirdly (and perhaps most importantly) by giving the learners psychological encouragement.

Language practice takes the form of reading and understanding known or partially-known language. Each time the learner reads and understands a word, the learner's knowledge and understanding of that word is reinforced and extended. Each time the learner reads and understands a structure, the learner's knowledge and understanding of that structure is reinforced and extended. A learner who is reading a graded reader is not just enjoying a story but also practising both vocabulary and structure.

Graded readers also provide a limited amount of language extension. Because of the grading process, learners should not encounter too many new words or new structures when reading. However, in every graded reader, the learner is likely to meet a few unknown words. These are always 'glossed' (explained) through the use of illustrations or language within the text. Once introduced, these words are regularly recycled (used again) on succeeding pages so that the learner becomes increasingly familiar with them. Learners may be introduced to structures which are slightly beyond their immediate knowledge. These are glossed and recycled in a similar way.

Many foreign language learners lack confidence. They have a very negative self-image of themselves as successful foreign language learners. They fail to learn because they do not believe that they are capable of learning. Successful understanding of graded readers at a suitable level can give these learners enormous psychological encouragement – a sense of achievement which will be of more value than all the new words or structures which they may learn.

What is extensive reading?

Extensive reading is the term used in English language teaching for reading a wide range of books primarily for pleasure. The idea is that learners are motivated to read because they are reading just as they would in their own language – to learn more about something they are interested in, to enjoy a good story, to think about the ideas and issues the book raises, to increase their general knowledge and awareness. Learners are reading in a completely different way from the intensive reading of the language classroom, when they are looking at detail of language points and focusing on specific reading skills. When they are reading for pleasure they should be as unaware as possible that they are reading in a foreign language. The enormous benefit of extensive reading is that they are of course, by the volume of exposure to the foreign language, learning language as they read. The foreign language becomes increasingly familiar to them – so that they acquire language almost without knowing it.

It is easy to dismiss readers as being low priority in a language *teaching* programme. However, if we think about language *learning*, we can see the tremendous value of extensive graded reading. When its full potential is exploited it is seen to improve not only reading skills but all the other language skills as well.

Graded readers have all sorts of practical advantages: they are simple to carry round – learners can read them in class, at home, on a bus or really anywhere they happen to be; the reading need not take place in limited and precious class time; for many people the readers are relatively inexpensive. Teachers have found that once extensive reading has been introduced, it is straightforward to administer and learners enjoy the reading and make fast progress.

The over-riding aim then of extensive reading is to develop language competence and confidence. The difficulty for teachers is that they often want to make sure their learners are actually reading. This means teachers want to test their learners on their reading. This makes learners anxious and spoils their enjoyment of the stories. They either stop wanting to read or they only read in order to answer the questions about the text. They might indeed pass the test, but they haven't actually got the full value of reading for pleasure. Extensive reading can be monitored in all sorts of ways, as this book will explain, but this must never discourage the learner from wanting to read more. In the long term it is this which will educate them.

Why graded readers?

The idea behind extensive reading is that learners should be reading with relative ease. They clearly cannot enjoy what they are reading if the language is too difficult and they are anxious about not understanding it. If they don't enjoy reading, the chances are they won't want to continue – so the whole point is immediately lost. Graded readers are a temporary solution to this problem. It is important to stress that, through the use of graded readers, we are training and preparing our students for the extensive reading of ungraded and unsimplified texts.

Choosing the books

Choosing which books to read is tremendously important. Depending on how the reading is administered, the level should be suitable either for the learner's individual attainment level or for the level of the class as a whole. The Longman readers are carefully and conscientiously graded to meet the requirements of all levels of language competence, and learners can progress from one stage to another or from one series to another just as gradually or rapidly as they need to.

The content of the reader is of great importance in motivating learners, and here it is often sensible to involve your class as much as possible in the process of selection. You might like to give learners a questionnaire to find out their reading interests, so that when you come to place an order or when you visit the bookshop, you know that the books which have been selected will be keenly read.

Longman publishes an enormous range of readers to suit all tastes and ages, and the Longman Graded Readers catalogue and the Longman ELT catalogue are invaluable tools to help you and your learners make the right choice.

2 The class reader

What is a class reader?

A class reader is one particular reader chosen for the whole class to read for a certain length of time.

Introducing extensive reading in a foreign language

The current experience of many teachers of young teenagers is that their students rarely read extensively even in their mother tongue. These teachers have to introduce their students to the experience of extensive reading. This is often done by the teacher reading aloud from a graded reader while the students listen and follow the text in their own copies of the book.

This can make the stories both easy to understand and very enjoyable. The class know the teacher's voice, they are not faced with the task of trying to vocalise the words (even silently), and the momentum of the teacher's reading prevents them from 'blocking' each time they hear an unknown word.

Most teachers present the story as a series of episodes, reading three or four pages (about 5 minutes) at the end of each lesson. The teacher may ask the students to re-read the episode at home after the lesson. This would mean that, for example, *Dino's Day in London* (Easystarts) would be completed in about four lessons.

After reading one or two books aloud, the teacher may adopt a mixture of different techniques. The teacher will continue to read some sections aloud but will use the cassette recording in other sections. Sometimes, the teacher may ask the students to read the section at home before they hear it in the following lesson.

It would be useful for the teacher to read the first book aloud for all beginner or elementary level classes, and even for groups of adults. Remember that even adults enjoy listening to stories!

Reading aloud

Listening to the teacher reading aloud is very important for the learner's development of reading skills. Research has demonstrated that, in children, the successful development of reading is determined largely by their early, regular experience of listening to someone else reading aloud.

However, it should be stressed that we **do not recommend** that students should be asked to read aloud. 'Reading for Vocalisation' (reading aloud) is a very difficult skill – particularly in a

foreign language. Comprehension is often sacrificed because the students concentrate on the pronunciation of words, rather than the meaning. Asking students to read aloud reduces their confidence and makes them slower, less efficient readers – even when they are reading silently.

If you ask a student to read aloud while the rest of the class listens:-

a the reader will become tense and anxious and feel that he/she is being 'tested'.
b the reader will concentrate on pronunciation rather than meaning.
c the rest of the class will probably be exposed to slow, flat, expressionless reading and often the incorrect pronunciation of words.
d the rest of the class will be 'listening for mistakes' rather than listening to the story.

Reading aloud by students tends to destroy any interest or enjoyment which students might gain from the stories.

Introducing the class reader

Remember that all the techniques which teachers use **before** reading, **while** reading and **after** reading, are designed to assist and enhance comprehension rather than test the students' comprehension.

Always begin by talking about the topic whether it is fiction or non-fiction, and try to draw out from the learners what they already know about the subject or what their expectations are. With beginners and elementary level learners, it is perfectly reasonable to do some of this in their mother tongue.

The books themselves are usually well illustrated. Use the cover title and picture to talk about the book and ask what the class thinks it will be about.

If you look at the cover of *Marcel and the White Star* (Easystarts), you might ask questions like: *Who do you think Marcel is? What do you think the White Star is? What do you think happens in this story?*

Additionally, show the class pictures from inside the book. For instance, in a collection of short stories called *The Lost Love and Other Stories* (LSR Stage 2), there is a picture which shows a room with a strange-looking doll in it. Ask the class who they think lives in the room, what they think the story will be about, what they think has happened, why there is a doll on the table, etc. In this introductory stage, write new vocabulary items which may prove difficult on the board. This is very important in the elementary stages of language learning when learners can easily be discouraged. Take simple readers with lots of pictures in them, especially those with a picture above each piece of text such as *Flying Home* or *The Troy Stone* (Easystarts). Cover the text with a paper mask and then ask the class to talk about the pictures and note down the new

vocabulary as they go along. They can also make notes of how they think the story unfolds. They can then compare their version with the text.

Use the learners' knowledge of the outside world and encourage them to ask questions out of school as well as in. For instance, if you are reading *Elvis Presley, King of Rock and Roll* (LSR Stage 1), young class members may not know much about him. Encourage them to ask older members of their family who may be able to lend fan magazines, pictures, records, etc. If the story is a Western, such as *The Sheriff* (LSR Stage 1), ask who has seen a Western recently, when there was last a Western at the local cinema, etc. With well-known stories like *Dracula* or *Robinson Crusoe* (Longman Classics), find out how much they already know about the story, whether they have read it in their own language, whether they have seen a staged or film version (which will often differ greatly from the original and provide interesting comparisons).

Similar preparation can be helpful before readers concerning such topics as ghosts, monsters, and UFOs. It can be interesting to find out learner opinions on current problems and possible solutions before they read about them; after the reading, the discussion will be more interesting if previous doubts and queries have been answered or opinions changed.

There can be no 'rule' for the way a title is introduced. Without telling the story, an attempt should be made to create the atmosphere and give pointers which will help learners to understand the situation and characters better when they are reading. This may consist simply of whetting their appetite by linking the story as closely as possible to their own experience. If, for example, the story is about a natural disaster such as *The Earthquake* (Longman Originals Stage 2), find out if they have ever read about one or experienced one or seen a film about one. There will be very few reader titles which do not provide something in the way of a situation, event, experience or character that you cannot link to the outside world and the learners' curiosity and interest.

'While reading' activities

Whether the class is reading a book together or students are reading individually, the teacher will usually find some 'while reading' activities are useful. The purpose of these activities is:

a to ensure that the first part of the text has been understood sufficiently.
b to encourage students to think about key facts, events or characters.
c to encourage students to make predictions about the way in which the book will develop.
d to 'support' the process of comprehension. Many students get lost and lose interest in the middle of a book, particularly if the language is difficult.
e to keep up the momentum of reading.

Many activities are based on the idea of reviewing 'the story so far'. This can be done through retelling the story in a number of simple sentences which the students must put into the correct

order. Some teachers exploit the illustrations in the Easystarts series by mounting the illustrations (without the text) on cards. These are given to groups of students who place the cards in the correct order and then use them to 'retell' the story so far in their own words.

If there are several characters in the story, individual students can be asked to concentrate on a single character. Each student should look back through the text and illustrations and make notes about the character.

For example, if the class is reading *The Troy Stone* (Easystarts) a student might write:

Mark Jackson is on holiday in Turkey. He is staying at a big hotel in Istanbul. Mark is thirteen years old.

Today he is visiting Troy. Mark picks up a yellow stone.

Suddenly he sees a white light and hears a strong wind...

With some stories it is possible to write a 'diary' for one of the characters. In *The Wrong Man* (Longman Originals Stage 1) students might write the diary of Steve Malone, the Australian police agent.

Another technique is to write a simple summary which contains factual mistakes. The class is then asked to rewrite this summary with the correct facts.

'After reading' activities

Many teachers like to exploit the complete story after the students have finished reading. These activities will not only exploit the students' understanding of the text but also give them opportunities to use the language they have encountered while reading.

One popular activity involves matching characters to descriptions. In this example the students have read *The Wrong Man* (Longman Originals Stage 1).

Steve Malone	She's a newspaper reporter.
Sally Peters	He's a rock star.
Micky Munro	He's a doctor.
Eric Manton	He's a park ranger.
Jack	He's a police agent.

Students enjoy playing 'Who am I?' in which one student pretends to be one of the characters from the book. The class asks questions but the character can only answer 'Yes' or 'No'. The class try to guess the character.

At higher levels the student pretending to be a character can be 'interviewed' so that he/she retells the story from his/her own point of view.

Another enjoyable game involves taking the letters of the name of a character and trying to find words which begin with those letters and describe the character. Look at these examples from *Oliver Twist* (Longman Classics Stage 4):

F-ussy	**O**-nly child
A-nxious	**L**-onely
G-reedy	**I**-nnocent
I-dle	**V**-ictimised
N-asty	**E**-ager
	R-ich (at the end)

Students can have great fun discussing these words and how they fit the characters!

Find a list of the characteristics of each horoscope star sign – Taurus, Aquarius etc. Invite the students to try to decide the star sign of each character.

Some people say 'we are what we eat'. It is true that sometimes food likes and dislikes are an indication of character. Students can be invited to speculate on the eating habits of different characters in the story.

If Hamlet were an animal he would be a ... If Hamlet were a city he would be ... If Hamlet were a type of food he would be ... These comparisons help students to express and discuss their impression of different characters.

A very simple 'after reading' activity is to ask the students to choose actors to take part in the film of the book. Sometimes this activity can be stimulated by suggesting unsuitable actors.

Sherlock Holmes	Sean Penn
Dr Watson	Rob Lowe
Mrs Hudson	Elizabeth Taylor

Planning the use of the class reader

Lesson plans will help to ensure that procedures and activities are varied, both for individual classes and for the teacher who is using readers with several classes. Any of the suggestions in this book should be considered as a 'possible' procedure or activity within an overall plan for each reader; suggestions should be adapted to suit each reader and the time available for it, as well as the age, level and interests of the learners.

As a guide to how to start working out a lesson plan or worksheet, ask yourself a number of questions:

a What level or age group is the reader suited to?
b Does it present any particular difficulties such as unfamiliar background, a lot of factual information, confusing sequence of events, a large number of characters?
c What kind of activities can be used with the reader?
d What kind of language and vocabulary is used? Is there any part of the book where the language can be exploited to reinforce language practice in the learners' course book?
e What kind of reaction is the book likely to produce among the learners? How can this lead to further practice, activity, project work, etc?

When reading the book for the first time, make notes of significant details of the book: facts, story-line, characters; also of points that will need explaining, language that can be exploited, any pictures, charts, maps, etc. that can be used to introduce the book or make it more interesting. Notes can also be made of possible discussion topics, subjects for composition, and so on. It is surprising how many ideas present themselves at the first reading and are subsequently forgotten as consideration of details obscures the wider issues. Lesson plans can then be made from these notes.

If the plan includes a discussion topic, make notes first, leaving space to add ideas that come out of discussions on the topic in different classes.

Outline notes about 'ghosts' might be something like these:

Do they exist?

If 'Yes': What kind? Where? What proof or reason can you give for belief?

If 'No': Reasons for disbelief.

Before making lesson plans, it is worthwhile making a separate list of different types of exercises and activities which can be considered in making up the plans for different readers. A check column on the right will make it easy to keep a check on how often a particular activity is used and ensure each class has sufficient variety in their work. Below is a suggested list to start with. It is not intended to be exhaustive and teachers should add to it as new ideas occur to them. More detailed guidance on exercises and activities may be found later in this chapter and in the next chapter.

a asking and preparing simple, factual (comprehension) questions
b preparing exercises – if needed, remembering that some of the readers already have a variety of questions at the back and in many cases these will be sufficient

c asking specially directed questions both for giving purpose to reading and for directing learners' attention to certain aspects of the book
d mini-dialogues or pattern practice based on an exchange in the text
e retelling part of the story
f retelling or rewriting the story or part of it from different points of view, or as it might be told by different characters
g transfer of information: where possible, learners make graphs, draw diagrams, pictures, maps, etc. to show they have understood the text
h role-playing situations from the book
i use of role cards
j discussion (controlled for lower levels; open, for higher levels, possibly leading to a debate)
k composition or summary work (written)
l project work, usually as an extension of a discussion
m speechwork

Using the class reader

We recommend setting a time limit on the use of any one reader. It is simply not fair on your learners to spin a class reader out over a whole school year. It will destroy their interest and motivation for more reading. Instead set a target of, say, a school term for one book. This will mean that you have to vary the speed of reading. Some parts of the book will be more exciting than others, some will be more descriptive, some will have more about individual characters. Even in a simple elementary adventure story there will be different 'moments' in the story which are handled in different ways.

Let your learners read parts of a story silently from time to time. This is a good preparation for home reading and you may be sure that more concentrated work is taking place than at almost any other time. Also such a period of silent reading in the class gives you time to go round and offer help and encouragement to individuals, which you may rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to do in other circumstances.

Some teachers play recordings of appropriate music while their students are reading silently in class. They say that this seems to assist relaxed concentration.

You should also read aloud to them from time to time. If there is a cassette recording available this can be a very pleasant alternative because it allows the class to hear different voices from the teacher's, and often these cassettes have interesting sound effects (see Chapter 5). When you read aloud, sometimes the class can listen with their books closed (especially if they know the section already). At other times they can read along as this helps to reinforce the sound of English words, which is often different from the way the words are written.

Reading aloud by students is possible when preparing plays for acting, or when reading dialogue which can be used in role-play activities, but this should only be done after the students have read the text silently and understood it (see Chapter 4).

Asking questions

At the elementary levels, ask straightforward comprehension questions, or questions which will reveal whether the class has understood the general meaning. You may also want to ask questions which encourage students to use their imagination – questions to which the answer is not contained in the text. *What do you think she had for breakfast? Where do you think he went on his holidays? How many children do you think they have?* Notice the use of 'do you think' in these questions which signals to the students that they should use their imagination.

From the intermediate level upwards, begin to ask questions which will make students think behind the action to the causes of events, the reasons for behaviour. Questions of 'why' and 'how' should replace 'what' questions as the level of the class progresses. In the early stages ask questions which do not require elaborate responses, to avoid leading the class into errors of production; later use more open-ended questions as their ability and confidence increase.

Do not constantly interrupt the story with questions. Let a section be completed first and then, if you are satisfied that the class has understood, continue sometimes to the next section without questioning.

Usually, however, you will wish to ask questions and the following are suggestions for ways of doing this. Start by choosing a few suitable sentences from a part of the story that has been read in class and ask two or three questions about each sentence, based on the types below. For these examples, sentences have been chosen from *The Prisoners* (LSR 1, p. 5):

John and Peter are walking from the bus stop.

Field and Stone are waiting in their car.

They are near the bus stop and they can see the boys.

a literal meaning:-
Who is waiting in the car?

b logical inference:-
Who are they waiting for?

c opinion:-
What do you think they are going to do?

d leading to learners' personal experience:-
Do you travel to/from school by bus/car? Is there a bus stop near your home?

Wherever possible, ask questions that bring out details which affect, or point forward to, later

events and will help learners to anticipate sudden twists in the plot; also, peculiarities of character and behaviour, e.g. 'Why is X feeling like this?' 'Why did Y react like that?' 'Has Z done anything like that before?' As learners progress, ask questions of a more general nature than before: 'Did you expect that to happen? Why?' 'When did you begin to suspect that... ?' 'How does/did (a fact/event/action) affect... ?' and so on.

It must be stressed that such questions should be used in moderation: not more than once with shorter readers and not with every reader. The way a reader is used should be as varied as possible. Above all, the suggestions above – or any other kind of questioning or exercise or practice – should not be allowed to frustrate the learners' desire to carry on reading to find out what happens next. In other words, it is important to select the time and place for questions, possibly towards the end of a classroom period when there is not enough time to read another section of the story. In this case, selected questions giving a purpose to home reading will also be appropriate.

Further practice

Class readers offer many opportunities for language work, whether oral or written, and can be adapted to a number of different teaching situations. They can be used for bringing together and revising language items which learners have already covered in their course book. When all the class has read the same book, it provides both a situation and a topic for practising dialogue and real communication. In comic strip stories or other heavily illustrated readers, the pictures can be used for vocabulary practice or for extending the learners' vocabulary.

Such language practice should be controlled and not allowed to interrupt the flow of a story. When a book has been read all through and understood, then a particular type of language pattern may be selected for practice, e.g.:

Why? – Because ...

[*The Missing Coins p.* 1 (Longman Originals Stage 1)]

Why are Pete and Carla in Bath?

Because they are students at Bath University.

Learners can ask and answer similar questions about the rest of the story: p. 2 *Why did they walk across the street?* p. 4 *Why does Pete want to look at the stamps?* p. 5 *Why isn't the man happy?* And so on.

This kind of practice is suitable for the lower levels only. More advanced learners will benefit more from taking part in discussions and other activities such as role-playing, interviews and so on.

3 The class library

What is a class library?

A class library is quite simply a box or shelf containing a selection of different readers suitable for the age and language competence of a particular class. The idea is that the titles selected should all be different. They need to be attractive to people who happen to be in the same class, but who may have very different interests from each other. Some will like adventure stories, some romantic stories, some classics, some will want to read about serious issues and some will want the fun of a strip cartoon. The level of the books will be roughly the same, but as some learners are likely to be more advanced than others, it is a good idea to cater for those inevitable mixed abilities, and learners should be allowed to see for themselves whether a book is the right level for them. As the overriding aim is for fluent, competent reading, where the overall meaning and enjoyment count for more than the individual words, it is important that learners are not discouraged by finding the books too hard or simply not motivating.

Choosing books at the right levels

Remember that in any class there will be a range of levels. Remember also that the students will all be at a higher level at the end of the year than they were at the beginning. Most teachers find that in any school year the range of books in the library should cover at least three different stages.

Some students will always want to choose the easiest books. Allow them to do this initially but encourage them to be a little more adventurous when they come to choose their second or third book. A good guide to selecting a book at the correct level can be produced by reproducing about twenty lines from the text and blanking out (with typewriter corrector fluid) every sixth word. If the students feel they can understand this text, then they should be able to read the book.

Remember that students can always read more difficult language if they are interested in the topic. If they have some background knowledge, they will find it easier to guess the meanings of any difficult passages.

Organisation

You will need:

1 *A selection of books*

There should be enough books for each learner to have one, and then there should be, ideally, half that number again. This way there is enough choice, but the size of the library is still easily manageable.

2 *A box or shelf to store the books*

3 *A class library record chart*

Your local Longman representative will be happy to give you as many copies of our attractive charts as you need. Alternatively, you can make your own. The chart should list the names of the learners in the class along the top, and the titles of the books in the class library down the side. The dates when the book is borrowed or returned by each learner should be recorded. The Longman chart provides space for the learner to indicate by a simple code method of A, B and C whether the book was enjoyed a lot, fairly or not very much. By using a chart like this, the teacher can administer the library successfully and also see at a glance what books have been popular and how each learner is progressing with the amount of reading they are able to take on. Learners can readily see what books their friends have chosen and whether they recommend a particular title.

Preparing to read

Begin by finding out a little bit more about the books than you can learn from the catalogue. The techniques below encourage learners to get useful information about a book before they start reading. This will build up their interest in a text, and train them to recognise different text types and to guess and to predict what the text is about.

a *Elementary level readers*

The following can be done with all readers but has been found to be particularly useful with levels 1 and 2 where learners' reading abilities in the new language are limited.

Preparation: Make sure the class knows the common words for different story types (adventure, detective, love story, science fiction, etc.).

Pair work: Give two or three books to each pair and set them this task. Ask learners to look at the cover of the book, then ask them:

- What's the title?
- What kind of story do you think it is?
- Is there a picture on the cover? What is it?

Now learners should look inside the book. Ask them:

- Are there a lot of pictures?
- What kind of pictures? (photos, drawings, strip cartoons)
- When does the story take place? (a long time ago, now, etc.)
- Who are some of the people in the story?

- Do you think the story will be exciting, funny, romantic, etc?

Pairs can report back to the class. Depending on the level, and type of class, this phase might be done in the mother tongue. The use of the mother tongue can be limited by insisting that the pairs report back in English.

b *Level 2 and upwards*

The learners should by now have had some experience in reading English. This pre-reading phase requires the learners to use any information on the back cover, the introduction, and the list of contents. (If there is no summary of the story on the back cover, learners may later want to write their own for the benéfit of other learners in the class.)

Learners can be asked to look at the title and asked what they think they will find in the book. When they have answered, they can turn to the back cover, the contents page and introduction, if there is one, to see if they were right. They might by now be able to answer when and where the story takes place and also who they meet in the story. By looking inside the book they should be able to say whether there is one long story, a number of short stories, a play, several plays or whatever else.

Guidance

In the early stages, until the reading habit builds up, it is important to give the class some guidance as well as encouragement in their reading. Many of them may hardly ever have read in their own language so you cannot take these early stages for granted. Always give a purpose for reading a book. In some countries, teachers have written or typed a couple of 'focus' questions inside the front cover of each book. The aim is to encourage the learner to look for the main point of the book and not worry too much about the individual words. Too often learners think that by understanding each word in a sentence they have understood the total meaning. This may well not be the case. Unless you give early guidance to help them concentrate on the main points of a book they may become rather inefficient readers and certainly will read slowly. This is a problem in many countries and there is no doubt that by encouraging a lot of reading from the early stages of learning English, you can overcome this problem. Guidance from the early stages in reading simple, narrative stories will be of help later when learners come to more difficult texts. Here are a few examples of the kind of 'focus' question which you can give before the book is read:

Girl Against the Jungle (LSR Stage 2) – How did Suzanne stay alive in the jungle?

K's First Case (LSR/Longman Originals Stage 2) – Who has been murdered? Who are the suspects? Who do you think is the murderer?

Dance! (Galaxies Level 2) – What kind of dances are there in this book? Which do you find most interesting and why?

Point out that they can answer these questions very briefly: it is not the intention to turn them into full-scale discussion or composition. Do not forget that in some books you will be able to focus the learners' attention on different aspects and you might decide to choose one which they might not otherwise have thought about or fully appreciated.

A different kind of purpose to reading can be given by simply asking learners to:

a read a given number of books per term (or year), listing them in order of preference and being prepared to justify this order;
b be prepared to talk about one of the books, whether read in class or outside; a learner should be able to say why she/he has chosen to talk about one rather than another title;
c prepare a collage of pictures, maps, realia, etc. related to any book read in or outside the classroom; the learner should be prepared to discuss the reason for including – or excluding – any item from the collage.

Where suitable, this can also be seen as an exercise in 'transformation of information', since it will sometimes be possible to draw diagrams, graphs or route maps to illustrate parts of the text.

Group reading

We have assumed in the discussion of extensive reading that learners each have their own individual title which they exchange for another title as soon as they have finished. But this may be difficult to achieve immediately, either because there are not enough different titles to go round, or because some learners find they cannot easily acquire the reading habit.

Group reading, also known as shared experience reading, may be one way to help learners in these circumstances. Shared experience reading means that a group of learners share the same title and work together both in reading and in related activities. The idea works like this:

a Set a group task, be it a 'focus' question or other task.
b Encourage the faster readers to help the slower ones.
c Each group can plan its own activities with the help of the teacher and one person can keep a record of these activities. One person in the group will draw (for instance) a time chart, another will draw pictures of the main characters, etc.
d Set aside part of a lesson for each group to present their title to the rest of the class. This could involve acting out part of a story; asking the rest of the class to quiz them about the book; telling the rest of the class what kind of book it is; what its main points are; where its interest lies, etc. (Most of the ideas in this book can be adapted to shared experience reading.)

Have a spare set of books (a new title) so that as soon as one group has presented their title, they can start a new one. After the second group has presented their title, they can (if they wish) read the first group's title and so on until all titles have been read by each group.

Checking and monitoring

One of the simplest and most effective ways of checking that reading is taking place is to have a series of report cards such as the type widely used in Holland and other countries. Below you can see an example of a report card which the learner fills in after reading each book.

Report by _____

on the book _____

Type of book: *adventure / love story / short stories / play / facts / etc.

I *enjoyed / was quite interested in / did not like / this book.

(For a story)

I liked these characters _____

I didn't like these characters _____

The most *interesting / exciting / amusing part of the book is:

_____

* cross out the words you don't want to use.

These report cards can be kept in a box or file for future reference: they are a good means of measuring progress over a school year or a number of years as learners explore different kinds of book and try more difficult levels. The cards also serve a useful function as a pointer to titles which are likely to be popular with other classes, and you may decide to buy in some extra copies, anticipating likely demand.

Another way to check that reading is taking place is to have a regular 'book spot' in a lesson (perhaps once every three or four weeks). Learners would be invited to talk to the class and make recommendations. There will be no pretending or evasion as it is more difficult to deceive fellow classmates than it is the teacher. It is natural to try to persuade friends to read books that we ourselves enjoyed and this activity can be valuable because it is real communication of thoughts and ideas.

Other ideas for checking and monitoring can be found in the next chapter, which is about readers as a basis for communicative activities. Whatever means of checking are chosen, try to build up a sense of confidence and satisfaction in reading. The best test of all is whether a learner actually wants to read another book.

When to stop supervising

Learners will in time feel confident to select books which are of interest to them, just as they do in their own language. And just as their reading for pleasure in their own language would not be monitored, so they should be regarded as responsible enough not to need this in a foreign language.

4 Readers as a basis for communicative activities

The ideas in this section are suitable for use with the class reader and as an extension to library reading.

Play reading

Play reading is essentially a group or class activity. Few learners will enjoy reading plays on their own unless they have the use of a cassette.

Choice of play
For most learners, the play should be at the same level as their level in the course book. A play is all dialogue and will provide lots of practice and repetition in a natural and motivating context. Beginners and elementary level learners should be given sketches and short one-act plays. Leave longer plays for the advanced classes.

Reading the play
If you have the cassette, start by playing a sketch through or a scene from the play. The idea is to get the general idea of what is going on and to let the stress and intonation patterns make a first impression on the class. Ask general comprehension questions to see if the class has caught the 'gist' of what is happening. Now let them have the book and read through at the same time as the cassette is played again. The next step is to ask them to read aloud, correcting pronunciation only where absolutely necessary. Following that, suggest that they learn a role as homework. When the class next meets, ask for volunteers (do not force!) to act out the scene at the front of the class. An alternative, especially if there is no room for movement at the front of the class, is to 'broadcast' the play. This can be done quite realistically by putting up a 'microphone' into which they all speak; if a large cast is needed, two tables and two 'microphones' can be used. The advantage of a broadcast is that, although some rehearsal is advisable to familiarise the 'actors' with what they have to say and how to say it, they can use their books as scripts just as radio actors do, preparing them during rehearsals by marking in pencil the stress, intonation, pauses, etc. Shy learners will usually find this easier than acting in front of their classmates and they should all be encouraged to enter into the spirit of the broadcast by laughing, getting angry, etc. as required. You may even be able to record these scenes on your cassette recorder.

With a longer play, you may like to give a summary of the play, its setting and main characters before you begin reading. A follow-up exercise could be for different groups in the class to prepare their own programme notes for the play, such as you buy when you go to the theatre.

Ideally a play should be acted with movement, and if sufficient space is available there will usually be enough learners who want to learn the words and act the play. Different groups of

learners can prepare the same scene and have a little competition which will encourage the shy ones to take part in order to help their group. Those who do not wish to act can do other things. It is most important to give something to everyone. Someone can direct the actors; others can prepare the 'stage' and be responsible for the props; a prompter will be needed. Others can be newspaper reviewers and of course there is always the need for an audience!

Make your own play
Many ordinary stories or scenes from stories can be made into plays, a task which is both interesting and useful. Comic strip stories which have dialogue and no narrative are already 'disguised' plays. Other books have considerable amounts of dialogue and learners can ignore the narrative parts such as 'he says', 'she asked'. Stories such as *Lisa in London*, *The Sheriff*, *The Last Photo* (all LSR), and many more are all suitable for the purpose.

When the book is mainly narrative, it is a useful exercise for the class to turn the narrative into dialogue. It is a way to practise changing reported speech into direct speech forms, for instance.

Role play

Teachers often ask how to do role play with classes at elementary to intermediate level. This section will suggest how it can be done using readers.

Simulation
This will require a little preparation because the learners must imagine themselves in roles based on or suggested by those encountered in the reader. They can work in pairs or in groups to invent a dialogue, using any information or vocabulary from the book. Alternatively, they can take a similar situation and invent a dialogue completely different from that in the reader, illustrating how different people can react in different ways to the same situation. The learners should prepare role cards which will help them in either of the above activities. The cards can be kept for future use with other classes.

The cards can also be graded for use with different levels of learners, with more or less detail depending on the class. With advanced level learners, the same situation can be played in different ways, either by varying the information or by allowing different groups of learners to work out their own dialogue from the same basic information given.

Here are some examples:

a *Shakespeare Detective* (LSR 2)

ROLE CARD STUDENT A
You are living in a city and think two men are plotting something.
Tell your friend, the police detective, what you saw.
Find out how you can help the detective.

ROLE CARD STUDENT B
You are a police detective.
Listen to your friend and ask questions to find out the meaning of the plot.
Tell him/her how to help you catch the criminals.

b *Fast Food* (Galaxies Level 1)

First, learners make a menu for a hamburger bar, or similar.

Learner A works in the restaurant.

Learners B and C are customers. B asks C what he/she wants and orders from A. Each pays for their own order.

c *K's First Case* (LSR/Longman Originals Stage 2)

Each person is one of the characters in the book. Each person reads enough of the book to be able to ask questions about the activities of the others. (Insist that they do not look at the back pages of the book and preferably keep them closed with a paper clip.) Different people in the class meet to discuss their findings. If a suspect is singled out the group may have to be tactful! Finally when there is a consensus in the group about who is the criminal, open and read the last pages.

Interviews can be made even more realistic when some of the class have not read the text, so the interviewer is asking for information which is new to her/him. The following example is from *Car Thieves* (LSR Stage 1):

ROLE 1
You are John Read. Your car (a Ford Fiesta) has been stolen from outside the Shell Tower building. You go to the police station. So that you can answer the policeman's questions read pages 1-7 and make notes about the car. (You will also have to look at the pictures.)

ROLE 2
You are Inspector James Wood. A man comes to you because his car has been stolen.
Ask him questions about it. Fill in the form.
Owner:
Make of car:
Colour:
Licence Number:
When stolen:
Where stolen:

Another example comes from *Great British Ghosts* (LSR Stage 3) *A modern ghost* (p. 28/29): Half the class has role 1, half has role 2.

ROLE 1
Read the story. Note down where and when it happened. Note down all the strange things that happened. Check the answers with your neighbour. Now pretend you are Jane C. You are being interviewed by a newspaper journalist about the ghost. Make a list of things you will tell him/her (short notes).

ROLE 2
You are a newspaper journalist. You are going to interview Jane C who has seen a ghost. Write down all the questions you will ask her. Work with your neighbour.

When the roles have been prepared, the class is divided into pairs with a Jane C and a journalist in each pair. The journalist interviews Jane C. Journalists can report back to the class. The whole class then reads the story at home.

Interviews

These have the advantage of being adaptable to almost any situation or level. Even with post-beginners, simple factual interviews can be set up using Stage 1 or Stage 2 readers. They can consist of interviewing characters in a story about their actions and/or feelings (as described in the story or, with advanced level learners, as imagined by the learners); they can also consist of interviewing a panel of experts who can talk about the information in a non-fiction title. Titles like *Dance!, Fast Food, Americans at School,* provide excellent material for this purpose. Learners should not be expected to give long and detailed answers.

Real information gaps can be created when the person being interviewed has read the text but the interviewer has not. A single interviewer can ask questions of several characters or experts; alternatively, one person can be interviewed by two or more people. Try to think of different contexts for the interview. If you make the context a TV interview, the rest of the class can act as a studio audience and be invited to take part by giving their own opinions or asking their own questions from time to time.

Try using a rolled up newspaper or a cardboard tube as a 'microphone'. Only the students with the microphone can speak. This prevents too many people speaking at the same time.

Discussion and debate

You will obviously be the person to judge when a class is ready for discussion rather than simply asking and answering questions. Every teacher knows the terrible silence which comes over a class when they are asked to 'talk about X' and are either unprepared or unable to express their ideas clearly, if at all. Initially they will need considerable prompting and help

from the teacher. Preparation is the key to success both for discussion and debate. Here are some examples:

Gandhi (LSR Stage 3): The class can be asked about all the different types of demonstration (peace marches, 'sit-ins', etc.) they have heard of or read about in the news, and say how effective they have been.

Customs and Traditions in Britain (LSR Stage 2): Learners can say whether they are in support of upholding traditions, and they can compare customs in their own country with those in Britain, and evaluate them.

Project work

When a class discussion at any level shows that the topic has aroused sufficient interest, learners can be encouraged to carry out some kind of (small) project work. They can do this in pairs or groups and the type of work will of course depend on the topic, but there should always be a purpose in mind: there is little incentive to do extra work and study if they are simply told to 'find out more about the subject'.

Questionnaires are usually challenging – they are quite difficult to set up and fun. The form of the questionnaire can be worked out initially in groups, with the teacher's help, and tried out on other groups in the same class. At first, it will be found that a number of the questions don't work, that is, they do not elicit the kind of answers that will be useful in a final analysis. Suitable forms of questions can be worked out by trial and error in the class, then learners can try them out on learners in other classes or among friends and relations, the eventual aim being to be able to analyse the answers and come to a conclusion from them.

A good topic for a questionnaire would be space research, canvassing opinion on whether the money should be spent in this way or in other ways; or energy: are governments doing enough in the fields of conservation and research?; or the current situation with regard to health and the medical service, etc. in the learners' own country (after reading *Fast Food* or any story which raises such issues).

In another kind of project work, a topic can be followed up by groups of learners collecting information and presenting it with pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc. to reinforce or extend any particular aspect of the story that interests them. This in turn could lead to a class discussion.

Here are three examples:
Blue Jeans (Galaxies Level 1) – groups of learners could do all or any of the following:

a Make a chart showing the history of jeans (pp. 1–19).
b Make and then do a market research questionnaire for their own and other classes about when, how often, etc. they wear jeans. They can then make a chart or graph or other pictorial/textual representation of the result.

c Use the 'quality' text on p. 25 to find the 'best buy' in the local high street, and then summarise the results.
d Make some new 'lifestyles' pages (pp. 26–27) by asking people they know. If a Polaroid camera is available they can also illustrate the pages.
e Arrange a denim 'fashion show' with 'models' and a 'Master of Ceremonies' for some of the other classes.

Girl Against the Jungle (LSR/Longman Originals Stage 2) – this is a lower level 'project'.
The class is divided into groups, and each group is given two or three days of Suzanne's ordeal. The groups must then read carefully the pages related to their days. When they have understood everything, each group makes a large pictorial representation of their section. When all the pictures are ready, each group presents their own picture to the class, explaining what happened, etc. When all the pictures have been hung up round the class, the class looks at them as they listen to the tape (or teacher's reading) of the whole book.

London (LSR Stage 1)
Using the book, a map of London and any other visuals you can get, prepare an itinerary for a day's outing that each group or pair would like to follow. Then do the same for your own town with a view to showing foreign visitors around.

Composition work

Many topics for written composition will arise from discussions of class readers, and learners will write better and with more interest if they have already talked about the subject in class. In the early stages, it is always advisable to discuss the topic in class first, with the learners making notes from a plan on the blackboard. As learners progress, they can make their own plans in groups and the scope for different types of writing widens to include such possibilities as:

a *narration:* retelling part of the story, whether from a particular (person's) point of view or as a narrative version of a reader that is mainly dialogue
b *dialogue:* rewriting part of a narrative story as a play
c *argument:* using the points already put forward in a class discussion
d *character study:* analysing character(s) based on the actions, words spoken, opinions of other characters in the story (much of this should already have been discussed in class)
e *descriptive writing:* based on information in the book about a person, a place or a building
f *imaginative writing:* based on the ideas found in the reader but allowing full scope for the learners' own ideas (e. g. after reading a science fiction or ghost story)

Such compositions should be given only after using a book for class reading. Any written work connected with extensive reading should be limited to describing which books a learner has enjoyed reading, and why, or preparing a short talk about a selected reader, to be given in class and possibly followed by a class discussion.

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5 Graded readers on cassette

Readers should be enjoyed, and the cassette can add greatly to their enjoyment. They bring the story to life, often adding interesting and atmospheric sound effects as well as helping pronunciation. It is obviously important learners can hear the cassette easily, and it is useful for a teacher to have a pause button on the machine for easy control of the cassette. Some teachers use the graded reader cassettes as a serial story in the language laboratory.

The cassette as storyteller

The cassette can simply be used in the traditional way as the storyteller and this is suitable for a class with a teacher or an individual learner without a teacher. Learners listen and follow in their books. It is important that the section which is being listened to is not too long, and although the teacher may like to ask one or two general questions, or explain any obviously difficult vocabulary, it is important the flow should be largely uninterrupted and no questions of detail asked.

Using cassettes without the reader

The teacher may decide to use the cassette on its own, without the reader, to give learners practice in listening. If this is the case, the teacher can make some preparation for this: a brief explanation can be given as to what type of story learners are going to hear; visual aids such as photos, maps, etc. can be prepared. If the purpose of using the cassette on its own is for anything more serious than pure enjoyment, it is advisable to prepare exercises to ensure that learners understand at least the essential parts. True/false questions or quick fill-in exercises can be used. Many Longman cassettes include a set of exercises.

An effective way of using a cassette without a reader is to stop the recording suddenly, immediately before or after something exciting or extraordinary has happened, or after a particularly strange or loud noise has been heard. You can then either ask learners what they think will happen or has happened, or what the noise was. If you can time the stop well – just at the end of the lesson – it should stimulate learners to read this part of the reader at home.

Using cassettes for plays/sketches

Obviously it is particularly valuable to hear cassettes of plays and sketches, although the teacher must bear in mind the length of the scene or section. Listening to these can be preparation for the acting out of the play by learners themselves. It might be possible for learners to memorise their parts from the cassette reading if they are short and relatively simple. Although readers which are already written in the form of sketches and plays are obviously most suitable for role playing and acting, other stories with plenty of dialogue can be adapted and used for a similar purpose.

Using the cassette as a serial story

A cassette can be very effective when used as a continuing serial story and played during the last few minutes of a class period. A very brief introduction will be necessary before the teacher begins a new story with an equally brief recap if the teacher is continuing a story. For this, a cassette should be chosen that is below the learners' course book level. Its purpose is to give learners a few minutes of relaxation and enjoyment – and they can just listen, or follow in their books. Stopping the cassette at a crucial or dramatic moment will make them eager to know what happens next.

Listening comprehension

One of the difficulties encountered by most learners of English is that when they do not immediately understand something, they worry about this and cannot concentrate on what follows. They need training in listening for important points, that is, listening for gist. In order to help them initially, learners should be given two or three questions which will focus their attention on the main points of the story. Questions can be asked after a first listening and learners can try to find the answers as they listen to the cassette for a second time. They should not write the answers but should be ready to discuss them when the teacher stops the cassette again. To encourage learners for whom listening comprehension is a new exercise, it is advisable to choose a cassette that is a stage or so below their usual level.

The benefits of cassettes for the class and the individual

The use of cassettes can be a delightful, motivating and instructive way of using readers for a class and for individuals. It can lead to class discussion as well as role playing and acting. If it is possible to acquire a number of cassettes, they could form part of a class library so learners could then borrow them for listening on their own or in small groups.

6 Holiday reading

Many teachers like to ask students to read one or two graded readers during the school holidays. We should recognise that this 'unsupported' reading is more difficult than reading with regular help and guidance from the teacher. Therefore, it is probably best to select a grade of reader which the students will not find too difficult.

It is possible to set regular comprehension check exercises like those we have seen above. You may like your students to keep a reading diary.

The reading diary

Recent developments in the teaching of literature in Britain have focused on the use of personal reading diaries. Students are asked to make entries in their diaries at regular intervals in the reading process. These entries will include notes on the following:–

a The student's personal feelings about the process of reading. *That chapter was a bit boring. Too much description and not enough dialogue.*

b The student's feelings about the characters, sometimes related to personal experience. *'Colin' is depressed all the time. A bit like that man who works at the garage in the square.*

c The student's feelings about the settings, perhaps related to personal experience. *I imagine the old dark house to be like the house in the film 'Psycho'.*

d The student's feelings about the plot. *I don't know why they said, 'Let's split up.' I know that they should have stayed together!*

These notes could be kept in English or in the student's mother tongue. Since they are a personal record of reading the book, it is not essential that they should be in English.

Students can be encouraged to look back at their diaries while they are reading and make notes of the way in which their opinions change.

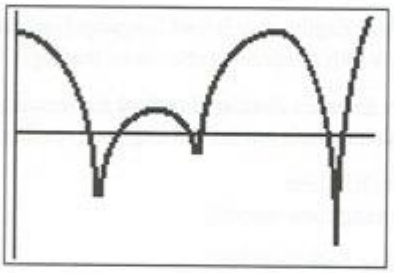
Sometimes students can be asked to re-read the same book again to see if they react to the plot, setting or characters in a different way.

Other types of holiday work

Some teachers have given the students a fairly simple book but have stapled together the last two pages. They have invited the students to write the end of the story!

Students can be asked to make a note of any new words which they learn while reading the book.

Students can produce a graph of 'good fortune' and 'bad fortune' for one of the central characters.



The graph can be illustrated with notes giving the reasons for the character's good or bad fortune.

At lower levels, students might be asked to draw or collect pictures to illustrate selected scenes or characters.

If students have access to cassette recorders at home, they could be asked to make recordings of short readers or scenes from longer books. Students will often enjoy adding music and sound effects to the basic reading.

Students at intermediate or advanced levels can be given a low level reader and be asked to write a graded reader at a similar level. This is a challenging exercise in exploiting limited language resources.

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