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ЯК ПОБІЖНО ПЕРЕГЛЯДАТИ АНГЛІЙСЬКИЙ ТЕКСТ
ДЛЯ ОСОБЛИВИХ ПРИЗНАЧЕНЬ КОНТЕКСТУ

HOW TO SKIM THE TEXT IN AN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES CONTEXT

Анотація. Установлено, що метод побіжного перегляду текстів є більш ефективний, ніж традиційні методи читання.

Summary. It is stated that learning to skim is more effective than traditional methods of reading.

English language teachers search the learning strategies to help students improve their acquisition of the language. These strategies can be valuable instructional tools, especially for the reading skill, because many English as a Foreign Language teachers find that there is insufficient practice time for students who are required to cope with studying a new language and to read for content. English suddenly becomes increasingly important for students who must take English for Specific Purposes courses and read technical subject matter in English. In some cases English is the medium of instruction and a vehicle of content information.

Although there are clear prescriptions from curriculum developers to encourage activities that require the use of strategies such as scanning – reading a text quickly for specific details, and skimming – reading or previewing a text to find the main idea, very little training is provided on how to use these strategies. As a result, students experience difficulties when reading research articles related to science and technology.

In this context, we present a lesson on how to teach skimming for reading specialized texts for those who learn English for Specific Purposes.

Even if students receive lectures on strategies, this does not mean that they will use them in the process of learning a foreign language. Strategy training should include instructions on when and how to use a particular strategy, and there should be elements of planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation into the task. When it is accomplished, strategy improves students efficiency in reading research articles, when the tasks require fast, selective reading – skimming.

Indeed, to decide whether to read a text selectively or straight through, and to separate relevant from irrelevant information, one first needs to have a clear sense of the purpose of reading. Different purposes may require different approaches to reading, such as scanning the table of contents, reading quickly to get an overall impression of s document, skipping whole parts if the information is familiar and reading more carefully when something important is spotted.

This is a lesson for students who read scientific texts. The objective of the lesson is to instruct students in how to use skimming when reading technical material. The presentation and discussion of the framework takes one ninety-minute session and the guided practice takes another ninety minutes.

1. Presentation and discussion. To begin, the teacher brings several research articles of approximately ten pages and asks students to select and read an article, and to report on the main ideas. After students have been reading for 2-3 minutes the teacher stops the students and asks for possible answers. Students show surprise and shock. How could they possibly give correct answers after having read just the first three paragraphs from the ten-page article. The students were using their traditional reading technique, which was a slow, linear reading of the text, they have barely begun the article. The teacher uses this moment of confusion to start a discussion on why people read, whether it is for the main idea, for specific details, or to find supporting ideas. The teacher extends the discussion to show that how people read is closely connected to why they read. Contrasting the reading of a train schedule with treading the local newspaper reinforces this point, and the discussion creates an awareness of the different purposes for reading. The students are asked to speculate on the purposes of reading texts in science and how these purposes may influence the way they approach the technical reading material. At this point , the teacher explains that skimming is reading quickly to discover the main idea of a text. Students look at how skimming would be productive for reading in general, when working online and deciding quickly whether it is worthwhile to download a document. Then, the students discuss how skimming can be used in the research context, such as reading the headings, introduction, and conclusion and gleaning information from any non-textual cues, such as pictures and diagrams [1; 76].

2. Guided practice. There is a three-step framework that can help teachers guide students to use skimming with a research article.

Step 1 of the process sets up the general macro-structure of the research article by focusing on its content schemata and discourse features. This helps the students determine the genre, the textual organization, and the rhetorical strategies of the article, and serves to activate any background knowledge and expectations associated with the text. it also helps students recognize any similarities with reading a similar article in their native language, so they can consider the transferability of strategies to the English for Specific Purposes context.

In Step 2, readers ask themselves these preliminary questions:
– What is the topic?
– Am I the intended reader of the article?
– What is the source and date of publication of the article?
– What is the research problem?
– What is the purpose of the study?
– Does the research article contain headings familiar to me?
– Do these indicators help me activate any relevant background / content knowledge?

The teacher then discusses how a particular genre might affect the manner of reading. For example, reading the headings and subheadings may not always be useful as a reading strategy for research articles because the same general headings are often used – Introduction, Background, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. Therefore, focusing on headings may not provide useful information about the article's content. All these questions are teacher-initiated at the early stages of the course and then, with practice, become a self-initiated competency that students may draw on when engaging in independent reading.

Step 2 asks the students to evaluate the requirements of the task. Here, readers establish goals for their reading, as they realize that skimming is a purposeful activity to determine meaning. The teacher demonstrates to students how they can determine the general idea of a research article by first reading the abstract and then by reading selectively through the whole article. Here three worksheets are used to introduce students to the various skimming choices they can make, which will be contingent on the purpose of reading. The different goals and sub-goals on the worksheets are represented by pairs of If …Then statements, which allow for students involvement in the choice of the skimming strategies.

The use of the worksheets demonstrates a step-by-step process for the different strategies one can use when skimming a research article for main ideas, namely, reading different sections like the abstract, introduction, and conclusion, reading the title and subtitles, reading the first and the last lines of a paragraph, and looking at nonverbal information, such as figures and tables, and reading their captions. As students become acquainted with these proposed lists of strategies for handling this task, they may later combine different pairs of If…Then statements as they monitor and adjust their skimming strategy.

Step 3 provides students with a repertoire of strategic behaviors requiring certain decisions to be taken concerning the reading speed and level of processing to be adopted, which interfaces with the skimming strategies chosen from Step 2 [2; 34].

Finally, students engage in the evaluation of the reading outcome and determine if the strategies improved their skimming ability. If their success is not satisfactory, they can begin again at Step 3, the choice of strategy; at Step 2, the assessment of task requirements; or at Step 1, the very beginning of the process of setting up a macrostructure for the text.

Although this example of strategy training was for skimming, practitioners will find the framework and worksheets applicable to other reading strategies, such as scanning and vocabulary enrichment, and to other activities associated with speaking, listening, and writing skills.

References

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