

Reading Strategies

The reading strategies offered on this page will help you become a better reader. These strategies will work both in and out of the classroom, but are particularly useful in the classroom. If you learn and use the reading strategies on this page you will improve both your reading comprehension and test scores.

Strategy 1: Ignore words that are unimportant.

When reading, you may often come upon a word or phrase that you don't understand. Your first impulse may be to look up the word in your dictionary. Before resorting to a dictionary, though, you should first determine whether the word you don't know is important. If it isn't, then ignore it. Consider the following sentence.

The farvenugen truck was parked in front of the house.

What does the word farvenugen mean? You probably don't know. Right? Now ask yourself, Is the word farvenugen important in understanding the sentence? No, not really. We can tell that farvenugen is being used as an adjective, but it isn't important to the meaning of the sentence. The point of the sentence is where the truck was parked, not what kind of truck it is, so, we can ignore that word and still understand the sentence.

Strategy 2: Use the context to guess the meaning.

If you follow Strategy 1, and you determine that the word you don't know IS important, then before using a dictionary, try to guess the meaning of the word from the context. Context refers to the words and phrases surrounding the word that you don't understand. Once you think you have guessed the correct meaning, then look up the word in your dictionary to insure you have made a correct guess. Then practice using the word in different contexts. This will help you increase your understanding of the word, which in turn will help you increase your vocabulary.

Being able to guess the meaning of words from their context is a skill that is particularly helpful when you come across idioms. For example, in the sentence,

Jimmy lost track of time and was late for class.

The phrase lost track of time is an idiom that means to forget about the time. If you didn't know the meaning of this idiom and you looked up each word in the dictionary, you still would not understand the sentence.

Strategy 3: Scan for specific information.

Scanning is a skill that requires that you read quickly while looking for specific information. To scan a reading text, you should start at the top of the page and then move your eyes quickly toward the bottom. Generally, scanning is a technique that is helpful when you are looking for the answer to a known question. This is especially helpful when taking a test.

Strategy 4: Skim for general information.

Like scanning, skimming requires you to read quickly. When you skim a text, though, you are not looking for specific information, but rather, you are trying to get the main idea or point of the text you are reading. When skimming a reading selection, start with the title of the text, then read the topic sentence of each paragraph. Skimming is a skill that is especially suited for doing research. By skimming a few pages of a reference book or novel, you can generally tell if the book or novel will be useful for your research.

Strategy 5: Read in units or chunks of words.

When we see sentences written on paper, we see words that are separated by spaces. What we hear when we speak, though, are not words but sounds. Words are separated by spaces on paper for convenience. Reading is similar to speaking because people who are proficient readers read sentences in units of words rather than one word at a time. This skill takes practice, but if mastered is well worth the effort.