

Reading Strategies I

Skimming and Scanning

Many people consider skimming and scanning as search techniques rather than reading strategies. However, when reading longer texts, they may be more practical than reading. For example, you might be searching for specific information, looking for clues, or reviewing information. Articles from newspapers or web pages, letters or mails, extracts from brochures are just a few of the things that a student may find in the Maturita Reading test.

There are different styles of reading for different situations. The technique to choose will depend on the purpose for reading. For example, if you are exploring or reviewing, you might skim a text, if you're searching for information, you might scan for a particular word and to get detailed information, you might want to try using a scanning technique such as SQ4R (to find more, look up particular web pages, e. g. www.wvup.edu/academics/learning_center/sq4r_reading_method.htm). You also need to adjust your reading speed and technique depending on the purpose.

Skimming

Skimming is used to quickly identify the main ideas of a text. Skimming is done at a speed three to four times faster than normal reading. People often skim when they have lots of material to read in a limited amount of time. Use skimming, for example, when you want to see if the text contains particular information or to locate a certain place in the text.

Useful strategies that can be used when skimming – read the first and last paragraphs using headings, summaries and other organizers. You might read the title, subtitles, subheading, and illustrations. Consider reading the first sentence of each paragraph. This technique is useful when you're seeking specific information rather than reading for comprehension. Skimming works well to find dates, names, and places. It might be used to review graphs, tables, and charts.

Note! Research shows that people have more difficulty reading off a computer screen than off paper. Furthermore, people can generally read and comprehend off a computer screen at the same rate as paper; however, skimming on the computer is much slower than on paper.

Practice/Class activity:

Go through your BRIDGE magazine or your text book and choose an informative text (a long one and best with many dates, numbers or names). Ask your classmate to make his/her list of numbers / names from the text. Your classmate will then dictate the numbers/names (in the correct order or jumbled up). See how quickly you can find the number/name. As soon as you find the number/name, read the text following/preceding the number/name and say what the number/word means.

Scanning

Scanning is a technique you often use when looking up a word in the telephone book or dictionary. You search for key words or ideas. In most cases, you know what you're looking for, so you're concentrating on finding a particular answer. *Note! This is the reason why TRUE/FALSE questions usually precede the text.* Scanning involves moving your eyes quickly down the page, seeking specific words and phrases. Scanning is also used when you first find a resource to determine whether it will answer your questions. Once you've scanned the document, you might go back and skim it.

Question:

Which technique would you most probably use when reading a newspaper?

Reading Strategies II

A Before Reading

- **Read the instructions carefully** – Instructions are often ignored by students. Students often get a false idea that if they know the type of exercise, they don't have to go through the instructions. It is, however, good to know that instructions "hide" information which can help the brain warm up. Look at the following instructions:

You are going to read a **newspaper article** about the **history of baseball**. For questions **1-5, choose** the best alternative **A, B, C, or D**.

The moment you read the instructions, the brain knows what type of text to expect, what style to expect and what vocabulary to expect. A trained brain starts to sort the vocabulary it has stored – searching for whatever vocabulary there may be connected with baseball/history.

- **Previewing the text** – It is useful to look at the organization of the text, the title, pictures and other graphics before doing the exercise. This will help initiate your brain. Think what might happen in the story, what words may be used, or what information the text might contain.
- **Familiarizing with the questions** – It is essential to take a minute or two to go through the questions. This will help you understand the purpose for reading. Before reading a text, you always have to think if you will be reading for the main idea/gist or to find and/or understand information in detail or to find out what happens in a story. It is very useful to underline key words in the question/alternatives.

B During Reading

- **Cross-checking** – Check one cue with another. Ask yourself, "Does this word look right, sound right, and make sense?"
- **Rereading** – When problems occur, return to the beginning of a sentence or paragraph and read it again.
- **Conforming** – Ask yourself, "Did that make sense?", or "Am I finding the answers to my questions about this topic?"
- **Guessing the meaning** – It may happen that the text contains some unknown vocabulary. Don't panic, because the unknown word/phrase is either not essential for the answer or it may be guessed from the context easily. It often helps to *Skip, Read On, and Go Back* - sometimes you can skip an unfamiliar word and read to the end of the sentence or paragraph, thinking about what would make sense. Then, using the context, go back and reread to try to determine the word.
- **Distinguishing explicit and implicit information** – Think about what information is given directly. Also think about what you know from reading that is not directly stated in words, such as how a character's actions show feelings based on the clues the author gave.
- **Making notes/Marking** – Don't forget that marking the text (underlining, putting down notes, symbols etc.) is always helpful.
- **Question/Item solving** – Most test authors organize the questions in accordance with the location of the information in the text - the first question corresponds with the information stated in the first part of the text etc. However, you must always consider the purpose of your reading first, e.g. if the question asks about the main idea of the text, you will have to read the whole text first to find the answer.
- **Eliminating alternatives** – It often happens that you eliminate one alternative easily. Don't forget to make a cross next to it! If you are not sure about your answer, put some mark next to the question (e.g. ?, •). This way, you can go back to the question quickly if there is time left.

Answer: *When you read a newspaper, you're probably not reading it word-by-word, instead you're scanning the text.*