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# INTEGRATING THE ESL READER INTO THE AMERICAN COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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A non-native speaker of English attending an American college or university needs a variety of reading skills to succeed as a student, as a resident of an American town or city, and as a member of the cultural community. Although each student's needs will differ according to his/her previous amount of contact with the English language, certain general needs can be assessed for the non-native speaker who has at least an intermediate range of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Both secondary and college teachers can help ESL (English as a Second Language) readers prepare for and adjust to life on an American college campus by recommending specific reading materials and techniques to help meet these students' needs.

Four general categories of reading needs can be defined for the ESL student:

1. *The need to read and understand materials associated with life as a college student.* On a typical day, the ESL reader might encounter such materials as college catalogues, registration forms, schedules of classes, course syllabi, campus newspapers, campus signs, posters for campus events, and library use instructions, not to mention reading assignments for particular courses. Besides developing specialized reading skills for these different kinds of materials, the reader must learn the uniquely American vocabulary of informal English usage. He/she needs to learn how to "fill out" forms, how to "hand in" assignments, how to "make up" exams, how to "catch up on" missed homework, and how to "goof off" while "hanging around" at the student union. But, in addition to learning how to "get around" on a college campus, the ESL reader has further needs.

2. *The need to read and understand materials associated with finding one's way around the town or city where one lives and taking care of one's basic needs.* Think about how much native English speakers take certain reading materials for granted: bus schedules, city maps, the white and yellow pages of the telephone book, restaurant menus, to name just a few. The non-native speaker, however, needs to learn how to deal successfully with all of these basic types of information. Then, too, the ESL reader must learn to understand local newspapers, not only to find out the state of current events but also to learn where to shop for groceries, how to locate an inexpensive but reliable used car, and (in

places such as Wisconsin) where to buy such indispensable items as snorkel parkas and stocking caps. Related to this group of basic needs is another important need.

3. *The need to read and understand materials associated with the social and cultural life of the town or city where one lives.* For instance, the student needs to locate information about various religious groups, information about childcare and adult education classes, information about the campus International Student Association, and information about campus support groups formed by others from his/her native country. It is important to remember that, though the ESL student needs to become involved in the U.S. culture while living in the states, the student may return to his/her native country and needs to keep abreast with the social, political, and economic situation there. Finally, the ESL student has one more important reading need.

4. *The need to read and understand legal and statutory materials.* Knowledge about the system of city, state, and federal government in the United States is not only interesting but also important to the non-citizen, who must abide by the system's laws while living in this country. Laws that most U.S. citizens take for granted, such as traffic statutes or driver's license regulations, are not second nature to the ESL student. Thus, he/she may need to learn how to prepare for the driver's license examination or how to study the right-turn-on-red regulation. If the student works while in the U.S., he/she needs to be fully aware of the tax laws affecting his/her situation. Perhaps the most important statutes for the student to read and understand, however, are those governing different types of visas and their respective work restrictions. For example, the student needs to understand what having a B-2 (tourist) or an F-1 (student) visa means; and he/she needs to know how to apply for an I-20 form, issued through the college or university to verify one's student status. These are but a few examples of legal materials which the ESL reader must be able to comprehend.

Now that the student's reading needs and the kinds of reading materials that he/she might typically encounter have been examined, what practical reading tips can the teacher offer to this type of reader? Before discussing specific advice, let me explain three key points to bear in mind regarding the ESL reader. First, he/she needs a context for all reading experiences. Learning the meanings of isolated idiomatic expressions will not help the student learn to recognize, understand, and use these items. Therefore, contextualizing reading experiences is essential to the success of the ESL reader's experiences. Second, materials that have immediate practical value will prove most useful to the reader. Studying the history of the U.S. Congress, for example, will probably not be as immediately useful as reading and understanding the classified advertisements section of the daily newspaper. Third, this reader's high motivation level, necessitated by the desire to read for survival in an unfamiliar culture, should be kept in mind. This high motivation level, necessitated by the desire to read for survival in an un-

familiar culture, should be kept in mind. This high motivation level often makes it possible for the ESL reader to progress more quickly than other readers in learning and using reading skills.

Now for practical tips. Structural analysis skills are important to the reader's progress because he/she needs to actively engage in prefix, root, and suffix analysis when meeting unfamiliar words in context. Learning the highly unpredictable system of negative prefixes (e.g., *invaluable*, *nonviolent*, *unhappy*, *irreparable*) and learning Latinate forms borrowed into English (e.g., *con-*, *ex-*, *ad-*, *counter-*) are prerequisites to becoming skilled in word analysis. The student can practice this skill by underlining unfamiliar words with negative prefixes or Latinate parts of hypothesizing about their meanings by using context clues.

The student also needs to engage in sentence structure analysis. Since the English word order differs from that of many other languages, the ESL reader needs to develop "decoding" skills to determine underlying meanings from surface forms. An excellent practice drill which the teacher can initiate is the underlining and identification of sentence parts:

Subj.	Verb	Ind.		Obj.	Dir.
Obj.	Prep.	Obj.	Prep.	Obj.	

The father gave his daughter five dollars for an evening at the movies.

Once the student has learned this "decoding" skill, he/she can apply it to high interest reading materials of his/her own choosing. A second useful type of sentence analysis is the interpretation of newspaper headlines. Deletion of words and inversion of word order often make headlines hard to decipher, but the student can learn to understand them by rewriting them in more traditional sentence form, as follows:

Legislators to Push  
for ERA Extension

Members of the U.S. Congress are going to support an effort to allow more time for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Packers' Start the  
Best Since '68

The Green Bay Packers football team, which has just begun a new season, is having the most successful winning season since the 1968 season.

Teaching the ESL reader the "headline decoding" skill has, it is clear, both practical value and high interest level for this type of reader. Thus, it is a skill which can be easily taught, learned, and used.

SQ3R (Survey-Question-Read-Recite-Review) can prove indispensable to the student when reading daily newspapers as well as textbooks. By studying headlines, introductions, subheadings, and conclusions of articles or essays or chapters, the student can get the Big Pic-

ture before actually reading the article more closely. The reader can also apply the surveying skill to such materials as college catalogues and course descriptions, where his/her goal is to understand general principles before studying particular details. After surveying, the reader can follow through with the SQ3R method by turning headlines and subheadings into questions and reading to find answers.

Skimming and scanning, related to SQ3R, should also be part of the ESL reader's daily practice. Skimming ads in newspapers simply to see what is for sale and what it costs can help the student figure out a budget as well as practice specific reading skills. Skimming the college schedule of classes to see what courses are offered can give an overview of departmental emphases. More importantly, such exercises help create self-confidence in one's ability to read for key words and ideas rather than to read slowly, word by word.

Study skills can be easily incorporated into the reader's daily experiences within the classroom setting, where the teacher can help him/her learn and practice test-taking and essay-writing skills. The teacher's explanations of the principles underlying objective as opposed to subjective tests can provide the ESL student with valuable background information which he/she might not encounter when talking to other students. Learning study skills, then, can be helpful to the ESL student in a variety of ways.

The final skill which the ESL reader needs to learn is the critical reading skill, that is, reading with a healthy skepticism as well as reading for enjoyment. Besides helping the ESL reader learn to read skeptically, the teacher can use newspaper and magazine articles to explain commonly used patterns of essay organization, such as process narration, informative exposition, and critical analysis—patterns which the student will eventually want to incorporate into his/her own writing.

Since critical reading also involves reading for pleasure, ESL readers should be encouraged to read not only difficult textbook and essay materials but also more relaxing kinds of materials, such as *Reader's Digest* first-person narratives, *TV Guide* program synopses, and newspaper comic strips.

The preceding discussion has offered an overview of the ESL student's daily reading needs as well as some suggestions for teachers to use in helping the student meet those needs. Reading is by no means a passive skill for the non-native English speaker at an American college or university. Rather, it is a skill that requires active involvement and the ability to enjoy as well as learn. We, as teachers, play an important role in helping this kind of student prepare for, adapt to, and succeed in the college classroom environment.