Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language

Edited by

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Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers

Series Editor
Penny Ur

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Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language

CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOKS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS
Series Editor: Penny Ur

This is a series of practical guides for teachers of English and other languages. Illustrative examples are usually drawn from the field of English as a foreign or second language, but the ideas and techniques described can equally well be used in the teaching of any language.

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Extensive Reading Foundation

The editors of this book have established the Extensive Reading Foundation, a not-for-profit, charitable organization to support and promote extensive reading. The royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to the Foundation. For information about the Foundation, its officers, and activities, see *www.erfoundation.org*.

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Introduction

Extensive reading is an approach to language teaching in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language. They choose their own reading material and read it independently of the teacher. They read for general, overall meaning, and they read for information and enjoyment. They are encouraged to stop reading if the material is not interesting or if it is too difficult. They are also encouraged to expand their reading comfort zone – the range of material that can be read easily and with confidence.

Extensive reading belongs in the language classroom. That is the premise of *Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language*. This handbook offers more than 100 activities for setting up students' self-selected reading and weaving it into the language curriculum. These activities give teaching suggestions whatever the focus of your class – grammar, listening, speaking, writing, or reading; whatever teaching situation you are in – foreign or second language, an intensive program, or a class that meets once a week; and whatever the age and language level of your students. The only necessity is that the students already have a basic knowledge of, and are literate in, the foreign or second language.

Good things happen to students who read a great deal in the new language. Research studies show they become better and more confident readers, they write better, their listening and speaking abilities improve, and their vocabularies get richer. In addition, they develop positive attitudes toward and increased motivation to study the new language. Colin Davis says, "Any ESL, EFL, or L1 classroom will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme of some kind, and will be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present" (1995, p. 335). This applies to the teaching of all languages.

Extensive reading is probably most usefully explained as a set of principles. We offer ten such principles here.

What (Exactly) Is Extensive Reading?

Because extensive reading depends on students having suitable reading material, it is fitting that the first two principles are about what students read. The rest of the principles follow from and depend on these first two.

1. *The reading material is easy.* This is the most important principle of extensive reading for language learning because students are unlikely to succeed in reading extensively if they have to struggle with difficult material. Learners read material that contains few or no unfamiliar items of vocabulary and grammar. (There should be no more than one or two unknown vocabulary items per page for beginners and no more than four or five for intermediate learners.)
2. *A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.* Variety means that learners can find things they want to read, whatever their interests. Different kinds of reading material also encourage a flexible approach to reading. Learners are led to read for different reasons (e.g., entertainment, information, passing the time) and in different ways (e.g., skimming, scanning, more careful reading).
3. *Learners choose what they want to read.* Self-selection of reading material is the basis of extensive reading, and it puts students in a different role from that in a traditional classroom, where the teacher chooses or the textbook supplies reading material. One reason that many students enjoy extensive reading is that *they* choose what they want to read. This choice extends beyond selection of reading material. Learners are also free, indeed encouraged, to stop reading anything that is not interesting or that they find too difficult.
4. *Learners read as much as possible.* The language learning benefits of extensive reading come from quantity of reading. For the benefits of extensive reading to take effect, a book a week is an appropriate goal. Books written for beginning language learners are very short, so this is normally a realistic target for learners of any ability level.
5. *Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.* Because learners read material that they can easily understand, it encourages fluent reading. Dictionary use is normally discouraged because it interrupts reading, making fluent reading impossible. Instead, learners are encouraged to ignore or guess at the few unknown language items they may meet.
6. *The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.* In contrast to academic reading and

intensive reading, and the detailed understanding they require, extensive reading encourages reading for pleasure and information. Rather than 100 percent comprehension, learners aim only for sufficient understanding to achieve their reading purpose.

7. *Reading is individual and silent.* Learners read at their own pace. In some schools, there are silent reading periods when students read their self-selected books in the classroom. Most extensive reading, however, is homework. It is done out of the classroom in the student's own time, when and where the student chooses.
8. *Reading is its own reward.* Because a learner's own experience is the goal, extensive reading is not usually followed by comprehension questions. At the same time, teachers may ask students to complete some kind of follow-up activity after reading. There are a variety of reasons for this: to discover what the students understood and experienced from the reading; to keep track of what students read; to check student attitude toward reading; and to link reading with other parts of the curriculum. What is important is that any follow-up activity respect the integrity of the reading experience and that it encourage rather than discourage further reading.
9. *The teacher orients and guides the students.* Extensive reading is different in many ways from traditional classroom practice, and teachers need to explain to students what it is, why they are doing it, and how to go about it. The teacher will also want to keep track of what and how much students read and their reactions to what was read in order to guide them in getting the most out of their reading.
10. *The teacher is a role model of a reader.* Example is the most powerful instructor. If the teacher reads some of the same material that the students are reading and talks to them about it, this gives the students a model of what it is to be a reader. It also makes it possible for the teacher to recommend reading material to individual students. In this way, teacher and students can become an informal reading community, experiencing together the value and pleasure to be found in the written word.

Extensive Reading Activities

These ten principles provide a theoretical framework for putting extensive reading into action in the language classroom. The activities in this handbook implement them in practice.

The activities have a variety of purposes. In Part I, the activities help teachers introduce extensive reading to students, organize and introduce suitable reading material, motivate and support, and monitor and evaluate reading.

In Parts II–V, the activities link reading with particular aspects of language learning, for example, increasing oral fluency, improving reading and writing skills, or learning new vocabulary. Most of these activities assume that students have access to suitable reading material, usually a library of books, from which they can select what they want to read.

Using the Activities

The activities are laid out in easy-to-use format, as follows:

Level: This indicates the approximate level of proficiency that students need to have in the foreign or second language in order to do the activity. These levels are best regarded as guides. If you think an activity marked *Intermediate to Advanced* might work with your high beginner class, by all means go ahead and try the activity.

Aim(s): This indicates the primary goal(s) or purpose(s) of the activity.

Preparation: This lists what you as the teacher need to do so you can model (i.e., demonstrate) or introduce the activity to students. There is also mention of any necessary or useful material or equipment, for example, a handout, a stopwatch, or an OHP (overhead projector).

Procedure: This is a step-by-step guide for how to use the activity. It is often suggested that part of an activity be done by individual students or pairs of students or small groups (i.e., three or four students), or as a whole class.

Tip(s): These are ideas to make the activity easier to use. For example, "Ask colleagues and neighbors to help you collect materials."

Extension(s): These are ways of expanding the activity beyond the basic procedure. For example, "Display the posters in the library or classroom."

Variation(s): These are alternative ways of doing the activity. For example, "Instead of having students work individually, have pairs or small groups of students select an item and fill out the analysis sheet."

Contributed by: This indicates the name of the teacher who contributed the activity, with affiliation and country. Some contributors whose family

names would generally be written first in their home countries have asked that their names be written in that order. (In the Index, the names of all contributors are arranged alphabetically by family name.)

Contributor writes: This is the contributor's voice, speaking directly to other teachers about the activity.

Another teacher who has used a version of this activity writes: Occasionally others relate their experiences or give suggestions.

Box: Photocopiable material for an activity is offered in a box with a copyright line at the bottom. There are also boxes with example material. Some examples of student writing in these boxes and elsewhere in the book are uncorrected and may contain errors of usage.

Make the Activities Your Own!

When demonstrating some of these activities in teachers' workshops, we have been asked if it is OK to modify an activity in a certain way. For example, the procedure for Activity 7.1 Where's the Drama? calls for students to do a dramatic reading for about a minute. A teacher asked whether it would be all right for her students to read for twice as long. Our answer? Of course!

When you use an activity, assume ownership of it. You should certainly adapt, change, modify, and adjust all of the activities to fit your own classroom, your style of teaching, your students, and your school.

Coda: The Pleasure Principle

In a Japanese-as-a-foreign-language class, one of the editors of this handbook started out the class orientation by giving the students what he called *the three rules of extensive reading*. He wrote the first rule on the board:

1. Enjoy!
   The students dutifully wrote this in their notebooks. Then he wrote the second rule on the board:
2. Enjoy!
   A ripple of laughter rolled across the room. And as he began to write the third rule, everyone shouted out:
3. Enjoy!
   The students had certainly gotten the message that their extensive reading in the foreign language was meant to be pleasurable.

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