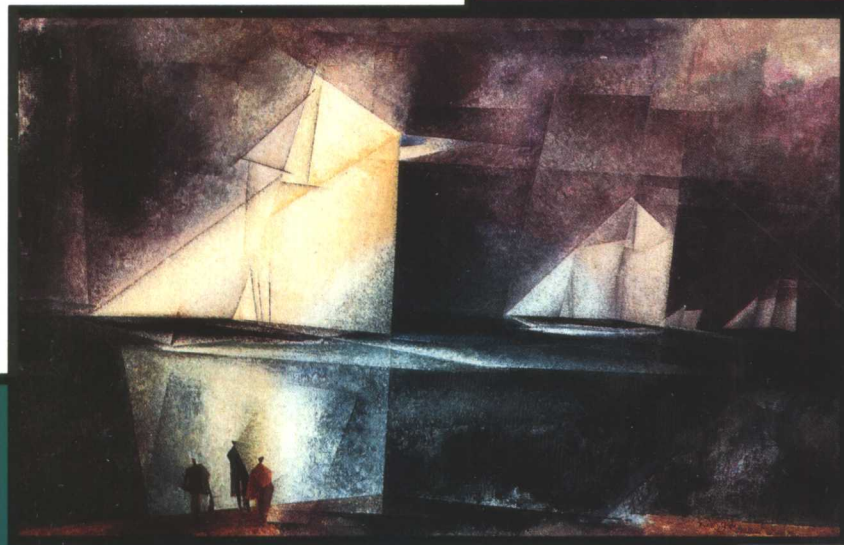


Ben E. Johnson

The Reading Edge



SECOND EDITION

*Thirteen
Ways to
Build
Reading
Comprehension*

THE
**The
Reading
Edge**

Ben E. Johnson
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*Thirteen
Ways to
Build
Reading
Comprehension*

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Preface

This new edition of *The Reading Edge: Thirteen Ways to Build Reading Comprehension* is bigger and better. It has benefited greatly from the hundreds of teachers and thousands of students who have used the first edition and who have taken the time to indicate what they consider to be most useful and valuable about the book. These users have also indicated what additions they would like to see included in the second edition.

Consequently this new edition, while maintaining the strengths of the first edition, is greatly enlarged. It has many new, longer readings with comprehension questions; additional chapter exercises; a reorganized chapter order; major sections on study skills, reading and interpreting graphs, word parts (roots, prefixes, suffixes); new section tests on both literal comprehension skills and critical comprehension skills; and much more. These many changes and additions make *The Reading Edge* an even more useful and valuable tool for both students and teachers.

Teachers are the major influence on how well students read. Students don't learn to read assignments with a questioning mind if their teachers have deemphasized comprehension questions in classroom discussions and on tests. Nor do students develop their critical reading skills if their teachers have always favored factual and application (noncritical) questions in discussions and on readings.

Literal comprehension is the simplest level of comprehension and the one that

makes the fewest demands on reasoning. Research indicates that questions calling for literal meaning are the most frequently asked by elementary- and secondary-school teachers. These questions depend for the most part on memory and recall of stated information.

In college reading, things change. College teachers often ask questions that call for the HOT (Higher Order Thinking) skills, for critical reasoning, evaluation, explanation, or conjecture, but students have seldom had much experience—and rarely much training—in answering such questions. This fact is often demonstrated when students take tests covering assigned course readings or when they are required to take standardized tests such as the State of Florida CLAST, the State of Texas TASP exam, placement tests, entry exams, exit exams, proficiency tests, assessment tests, or even advanced tests such as state teacher-certification exams.

Acquire the Reading Edge

The primary goal of this book is to enable student readers to identify and acquire the specific reading skills that will enable them to become not only efficient, high-comprehension readers and test takers, but also successful college students. Unfortunately, not all college students are successful students; some students are marginal at best during their years in college and barely manage to graduate. Of course, this is not what they actually want. They would rather be successful students so that the time and money they spend in getting an education is well invested. They want to learn as much as possible as fast as possible, and to do this they must acquire some specific reading-comprehension skills if they are going to achieve the “edge” that will give them a learning advantage in their college education.

And that “edge” is not so tough to acquire.

This book, *The Reading Edge: Thirteen Ways to Build Reading Comprehension*, shows step by step, chapter by chapter, how to acquire that reading edge on tests as well as in reading textbooks. There are thirteen chapters, each one focusing on a specific way to increase comprehension of what students read in *any* college course, no matter what the subject area.

Learn a Basic Comprehension Skill in Each Chapter

In Chapter 1, students will focus on techniques for mastering and marking a chapter, page, or passage *as they are reading it* and in a way that will increase their speed of reading, flexibility, comprehension of what is read, and retention.

They will learn to read with a pen or pencil in their hand, marking systematically.

In Chapter 2, students will learn valuable reading-related study skills that, when employed, will help them to master their textbooks and assigned reading in all their classes.

In Chapters 3 through 5 students will learn practical ways to build their comprehension in the three specific *literal* comprehension areas commonly focused on in both classroom and standardized tests:

Chapter 3—Determining the Meaning of Words from Context and Word Structure

Chapter 4—Recognizing the Main Idea

Chapter 5—Identifying Supporting Details

In Chapters 6 through 13, students focus on nine additional ways to build their critical comprehension skills to handle reading assignments and critical thinking tests:

Chapter 6—Identifying the Author's Overall Pattern of Organization

Chapter 7—Recognizing Relations Within and Between Sentences

Chapter 8—Drawing Logical Inferences and Conclusions

Chapter 9—Recognizing the Author's Purpose

Chapter 10—Recognizing the Author's Tone

Chapter 11—Distinguishing Between Statements of Fact and Statements of Opinion

Chapter 12—Detecting Bias

Chapter 13—Recognizing Sound Arguments

We have also added two new appendices. For those students who need to work with graphs, or who have never learned to interpret the different types of graphs commonly found in college textbooks, Appendix A contains useful instructions and examples to take the mystery out of graphs. Appendix B provides additional readings and comprehension questions for those students who want extra practice developing their reading comprehension skills with selections that are similar in length to the longer readings now found at the end of each chapter.

And that's it.

There are thirteen chapters and thirteen specific reading skills students need to improve if they are to achieve the "edge" in learning. Each chapter has several pages of clear, practical, how-to instruction in which that chapter's skill is explained and demonstrated. The demonstration is then analyzed to reinforce understanding. Each chapter's skill becomes second nature through practice required to complete the extensive exercises in each chapter.

Lots of Practice Develops Skill

The hundreds of reading selections and accompanying questions in this text are representative of the subjects and questions students will face in their college classes and on standardized exams of all types. Some of the passages (actually most of them) are of high interest and are entertaining—but some aren't. Some read like textbooks. Much of what students read in college will be interesting and entertaining, but much will appear to be slow, boring reading. But they will have to read it anyway. And like those diverse textbooks, this book includes a representative sampling from all subject areas and interest levels. Students will read about biting fish, baseball, movie critics, monsoons, robots, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, a potato entrepreneur, computers, drugs, missiles, continental drift, suicide, toothpaste, Elvis, Indians, carbon 14 dating, scandal, horse races, juvenile gangs, and much more.

These reading passages were selected from current newspapers, magazines, and textbooks covering every area of study in college. Recent textbooks from such areas as economics, physical science, political science, and history are used as sources for the readings in the exercises in each chapter. Often students will create the questions for a particular reading selection, thus gaining skill in anticipating and analyzing test questions.

You will also find that the readings and practice questions have varying degrees of difficulty. Sometimes the questions are easily read, understood, and answered, while at other times the readings and passages appear to be difficult. That is the way the book is designed for several reasons.

1. College reading material has different levels of readability. One text may consist of a majority of short, clear, easily read and understood sentences. Another may be composed of long, convoluted sentences that are difficult to follow.
2. Some college texts by virtue of their subject matter are difficult to follow and understand, whereas other subjects seem to make the reading of the text much easier.
3. Some college texts from areas outside the student's particular interest are difficult to plow through. Even though students know they must read such texts, they have difficulty maintaining interest and understanding.

Individual students already may have developed high competency with a particular comprehension skill, such as determining the main idea, so that Chapter 4 (Recognizing the Main Idea) may seem easy to them. On the other hand, they may not have developed *any* competency in another skill, such as detecting bias, so they may feel the need to review and rework the exercises in

Chapter 12 (Detecting Bias) more than once. But it doesn't matter that some college reading assignments may be difficult and others relatively easy; students still have to read diverse assignments—and they are expected to achieve high comprehension on all of them. Thus, in this book, as students learn new skills they will practice them on a range of different levels of difficulty and they will improve their reading comprehension in all areas. They will begin to develop the reading edge.

Diagnostic Tests Will Assist You

One last point: This book contains five diagnostic tests and a skill analysis guide designed to enable students to determine where their weaknesses and strengths are.

The Pre Test and Post Test each have 50 questions, the Literal Skills Test has 18 questions, and the Mid Test and Critical Skills Test each have 25 questions. The Skill Analysis Guide allows students to diagnose weaknesses from the pattern of incorrect answers in the tests. The Pre Test enables students to identify their weak areas before they begin reading the text. Once students have identified their comprehension needs, they will be able to move quickly through chapters in which they are strong, and slowly, carefully, through chapters on comprehension skills in which they need to improve. The Literal Skills Test, the Mid Test, the Critical Skills Test, and the Post Test will reveal where students are improving and where they still need work.

It's Time to Begin

And now it is time to begin. This book has been carefully designed to lead its readers into developing valuable reading-comprehension skills. All students need to do is faithfully work their way through the chapters and the results will speak for themselves. Their comprehension and critical reasoning skills will be developed, their ability to successfully answer test questions will improve, and their chances of successful learning will increase. Students will have the reading edge, and that will make the difference for them in college and in life.

With Thanks

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Ben E. Johnson

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<i>Pre Test</i>
Present Skills Diagnostic Test

This test has a time limit; your instructor will inform you how many minutes you have. Your primary goal is to answer correctly as many questions as you can during the time allotted. When your test is scored, your instructor's comments and the Skill Analysis Guide at the end of the book will help you determine where your strengths and weaknesses in reading skills are. You don't need to finish the entire test to be able to determine your strengths and weaknesses. Knowing these qualities you will be able to pay special attention to the instructions and exercises in the chapters on topics where you lack strength. Results from this test and from the other tests in this book will help you gain "the reading edge."

INSTRUCTIONS

Read carefully but quickly the passages and the questions that follow each passage. Circle the letter for the correct answer to each question.

PASSAGE 1

- 1 Several centuries ago, before the Industrial Revolution, men
- 2 and women shared the provider role. Men were responsible for
- 3 providing food, either by hunting or by farming, and shelter,