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Preface

The reading practice offered by this course draws on a wide variety of general knowledge topics. The final selection is the result of several major revisions in the course of extensive use of the materials in a number of university, adult education and senior secondary school contexts, where English is the medium of instruction for non-native speakers. Experience suggests the course is best used as one element in a general scheme of work in English, and covered at a rate of one or two hours per week.

The passages are of approximately equal length (500 words) and the same level of difficulty throughout, to allow a really meaningful comparison of reading speeds and comprehension scores at the beginning and end of the course. In practice, reading speed improvement has been found to be in the region of 80-100% over 30-40 hours of instruction, but equally important has been the improvement in comprehension and extension of vocabulary resulting from other elements of the course.

The vocabulary level basically corresponds to level 5 of the *Cambridge English Lexicon*, and is entirely within the 5,000 words of the *Ladder* vocabulary, developed initially by the United States Information Service, both of which were closely consulted during preparation of the material. The Thorndike and Lorge *Teacher's Wordbook of 30,000 words* (Columbia University Press) was also consulted.

Words which fall outside the CEL level 5 are occasionally explained for the student, where such words are not semantically contextualized and the reader has no way of working out the meaning. Sometimes, however, such a word is the subject of a vocabulary question and is therefore not glossed.

We should like to thank the many teachers who used these materials in the experimental stage - particularly Janet James at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Headquarters, and John Murray-Robertson and Michael James, British Council instructors at the General Wingate School, Addis Ababa.

G. M.

V. M.

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How to use this book

Students should be aware at the outset that this is not exclusively a speed reading course. Reading practice courses to date have tended to fall into two sharply distinct categories – those which concentrate almost entirely on reading for speed, and those which seek to encourage comprehension at some leisure and in depth. This book is designed to improve the reading of expository English in two ways. It should certainly increase reading speed, through the first 'Ideas' exercises, but it should also improve comprehension in the areas of vocabulary, sentence patterns and paragraph structure through all the subsequent exercises.

Ideas

The reading *speed* element is covered by this section. The best method is to begin each reading practice session with the speed/ideas exercise. Since the passages are all approximately 500 words long, timing is simple. The teacher should make sure he has a watch with a seconds hand or a stop-watch. He marks up on the blackboard the passing of each ten seconds. As the student finishes reading and turns to the Ideas questions, he notes down the last time the teacher has written on the board. The values for a 500-word passage are roughly as follows:

Reading time (min/secs)	Speed (w.p.m.)	Reading time (min/secs)	Speed (w.p.m.)
1.00	500	3.10	158
1.10	427	3.20	150
1.20	375	3.30	143
1.30	334	3.40	137
1.40	300	3.50	131
1.50	273	4.00	125
2.00	250	4.10	120
2.10	231	4.20	116
2.20	215	4.30	111
2.30	200	4.40	107
2.40	188	4.50	104
2.50	174	5.00	100
3.00	167		

Students should answer the Ideas questions without looking back to the passage and in as short a time as possible. Five or six minutes should be enough to answer these questions so that the whole speed section, a reading of the passage and answering the Ideas questions should not take more than ten minutes altogether.

How to use this book

The students should keep a record in a convenient place of their reading time and Ideas score for each session. The Ideas score should not fall below 6 or 7 out of 10, while a steady and encouraging improvement should be noted in the speed. The passages are definitely not designed for lecture/explanation presentation in the first instance, and bearing in mind that a reading speed of 250 w.p.m. is at the low end of the scale for an educated native speaker dealing with this kind of material at upper high school and college level, ESL students should certainly not take more than three to four minutes for a passage, with comprehension at around 70%. Initially, students will probably underestimate the time they need to read a passage under the mistaken impression that *speed* is the only important object of the exercise. It must be remembered that mere speed without retention is valueless.

Note that although units 1-4 are the same in length and format as all other units in the book, the passage content forms a revision of points relating to the process of reading speed improvement and should be re-read and explained with care by the teacher. If he wishes to time one or more of them for familiarization and as a check on students' reading speeds at the beginning of the course, care should be taken to go over the passage again in detail on completion of the exercise. Since this is an upper-intermediate to advanced course, however, it is expected that most students will already be familiar with many of the points covered in units 1-4.

Vocabulary

As far as possible, the vocabulary questions are designed to provide not only a contextually identifiable *correct* answer, but, in addition, to *expand* the student's vocabulary by including secondary and related meanings among the distractors. The student *must* look back to the passage for this exercise, as only the context will tell him which of the possible meanings of a word is the correct one for the passage. In many instances the student may be definitely misled if he does not look back. In passage 22, Vocabulary, for example:

roughly (line 2)

- a) approximately
- b) crudely
- c) impolitely
- d) exactly

the correct answer for this context, a), is probably no more common a meaning for 'roughly' in general English than either b) or c). This is an area where the teacher can considerably expand the students' recognition vocabulary when he discusses the answers with the class. Shades of meaning between apparent synonyms, prefix, suffix and root meanings can be explored. Of course it is not possible for all the distractors to be relevant in this way since the number of words with four or more meanings is limited, but the opportunity has been taken wherever possible, and it is just as important to explain why the wrong answers are wrong as why the

How to use this book

right answers are correct. Certainly the teacher should not be content merely to read off, or have the students read off, the list of correct answers.

Similar or different?

This exercise brings the student from word level to phrase and sentence level in close reading practice. Under the teacher's guidance, and with reference to the passage, he will consolidate his understanding of relationships between the more common sentence patterns in English.

Missing word summary

With this exercise, the focus widens still further to the relationship between sentences within the paragraph. In each exercise, five of the missing words are structural and five contextualized vocabulary.

Spot the topic

Here the student's attention is drawn to the thematic nature of the English paragraph, and the total effect in combination of its component sentences.

Discussion and writing topics

Towards the end of the course (passages 26- 28) discussion and writing topics are introduced. These are designed for the most general use possible, either for oral work with smaller groups, or writing practice after class preparation by the teacher. They broaden the scope of the course towards the end to lead on to more general work when sound reading habits have been firmly established.

All the later exercises should be worked through with as much guidance from the teacher as necessary. We should like to emphasize that only the Ideas questions are concerned with checking the reading *speed* practice. The remaining exercises should be covered in detail and with care.

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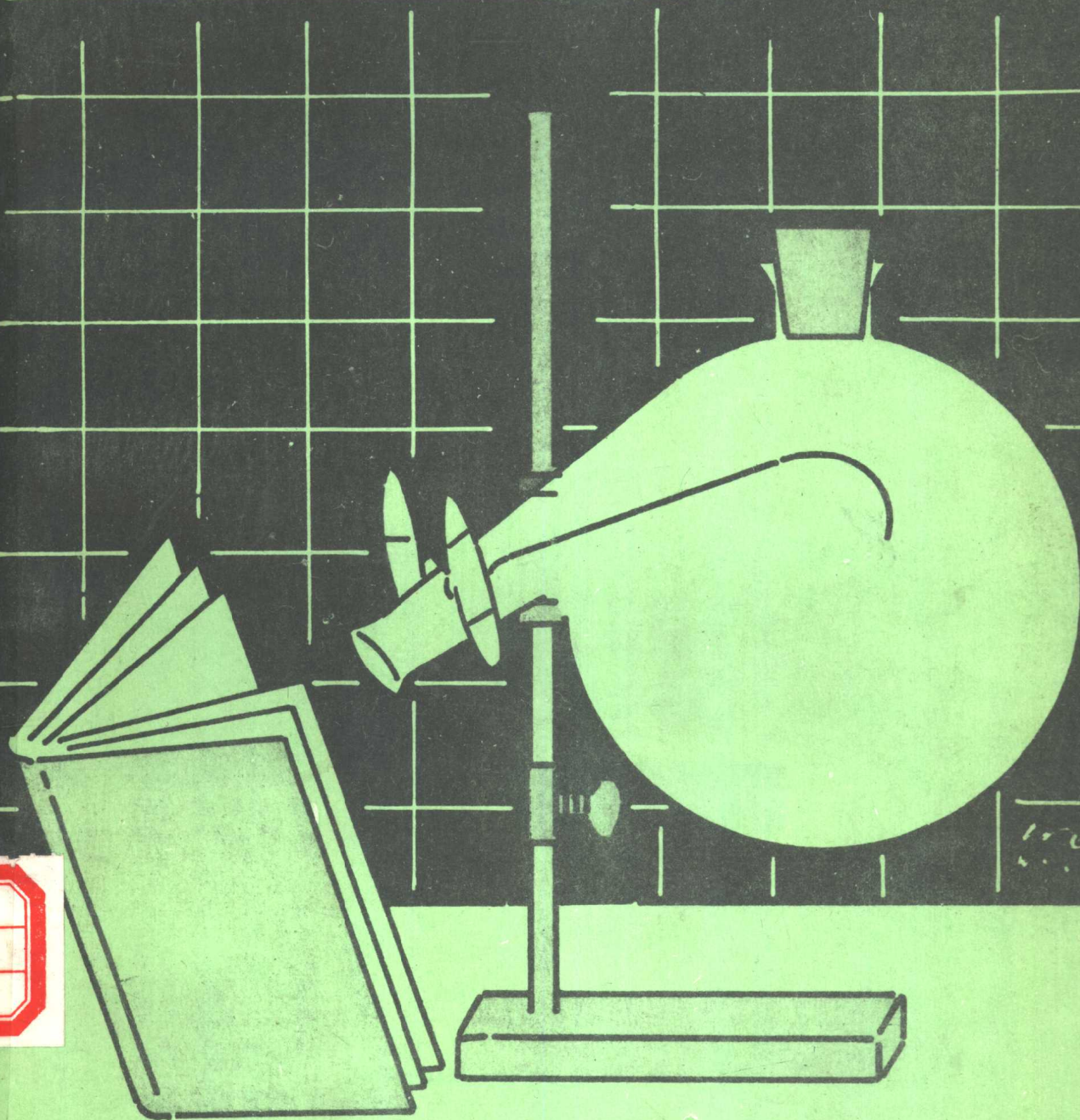
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Skills for reading

Keith Morrow

With extracts from New Scientist



Oxford University Press



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Keith Morrow

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Acknowledgements

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Unit 1 Solar physics:

New solar physics panel holds first get-together (abridged)
2 October 1975

Unit 2 Air bearings:

Plastic air bearings herald quiet revolution in textiles (abridged)
2 October 1975

Unit 3 The brain under stress:

Can the human brain cope? (abridged)
Dr Ivor Mills, 16 October 1975

Unit 4 Automating transport:

Automating transport does not cut staff
2 October 1975

Unit 5 Ozone depletion and cancer:

Ozone depletion and cancer
Dr Athur Jones 2 October 1975

Unit 6 The birth of stars:

New eyes on the birth of stars (abridged)
Dr Gareth Wynn-Williams 30 October 1975

Unit 7 Landing on Venus:

Veneras 9 and 10 create a sensation (abridged)
Gary Hunt 30 October 1975

Unit 8 The biological clock:

In search of the biological clock (abridged)
Dr Roger Lewin 13 November 1975

Unit 9 An end to soil problems:

An end to all soil problems? (abridged)
Colin Tudge 27 May 1976

Unit 10 The costs of safety:

The costs of safety (abridged)
Richard Wilson 30 October 1975

Unit 11 Technology for tunnellers:

Improving tunnel vision
16 October 1975

Unit 12 Agronomy in Guatemala:

Agronomy to the rescue (abridged)

Dr Charles Posner 2 October 1975

Unit 13 Homes for refugees:

Oxfam building polyurethane foam houses for refugees (abridged)

Adrian Greeman 27 November 1975

Unit 14 Do tranquillizers cause birth defects?

Do tranquillizers cause birth defects? (abridged)

Joseph Hanlon 19 August 1976

Unit 15 Mycology and food storage:

Trouble in store (abridged)

R. Drennon Watson 22 April 1976

Unit 16 Patents and inventions:

Raw deal for inventors (abridged)

Adrian Hope 26 August 1976

Unit 17 Fireballs:

Two recent European fireballs

5 June 1975

Unit 18 Genes in action:

On the verge of a new era in biology (abridged)

Dr Roger Lewin 17 June 1976

Unit 19 The schoolroom in the sky:

Who watches India's schoolroom in the sky? (abridged)

Avril Agarwal 24 June 1976

Unit 20 Brightening up the dashboard:

Brightening up the dashboard (abridged)

Ken Garrett 27 May 1976

INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND

There are 20 units, arranged in four sets of five units each. Each unit consists of exercises based on an article from *New Scientist*. In the first 15 units the complete text of the article is printed; the full text of units 16-20 is given after the Key at the back of the book.

The exercises are designed to practise systematically a wide range of the skills and processes involved in reading efficiently and effectively. More detail about the rationale behind the choice of texts and exercises is given in the next section.

The material in this book was originally developed for use on pre-session courses at the University of Reading. It has been used successfully with postgraduate students from a wide range of academic disciplines with widely differing levels of language performance and cultural background. Outside the university context, it will be suitable for a wide range of adult and young adult students. The level it is designed for is intermediate; however, this covers a wide area of language ability, especially as regards reading skills. Some students whose oral and written work is of a relatively low level will be able to cope well with the receptive skill exercises in this book and will gain considerably from them; on the other hand, students whose oral work is advanced may lag behind in reading and will find this work challenging and rewarding.

The topics and nature of the texts chosen make them widely accessible. Originally written for the educated layman, the texts presented here, with few exceptions, do not demand specialized scientific knowledge. The aim is to practise universally applicable reading skills within the framework of authentic texts of interest to a wide range of students.

A key feature of the material is the flexibility it offers to both teacher and student in the way they approach and use it. Suggestions are made in Section 4 of this Introduction about the use of the material, but no prescriptive framework is laid down. For this reason it is difficult to assess the time which different groups will take to complete a unit of the material. In general, the lower the language level, the longer the time that may usefully be spent on each unit. Experience shows that all groups spend at least one classroom session (45 minutes — 1 hour) per unit, and most spend considerably more.

2 RATIONALE

2.1 Choice of texts

All units are based on authentic texts selected from *New Scientist*. In some cases articles have been abridged, but they have not been re-written.

New Scientist is a magazine produced for the educated layman with an interest in scientific developments and research. However, the language of the articles does not represent what is often called 'scientific English' i.e. the language of scientific textbooks or research papers. The articles on which this material is based are designed to be accessible to the non-specialist. This has two important implications for its use in the classroom. Firstly, this material is not restricted in use to those who are specialist scientists; secondly, specialists in any area will want to study texts in their own particular discipline in addition to those presented

here. The role of these texts is to provide a vehicle of general interest for the practising of reading skills which can subsequently be applied to whatever texts the student wishes to study.

Some students have reacted adversely to this material initially by saying, 'I'm not interested in, for example, Agronomy in Guatemala.' The important thing here, however, is not the texts themselves. It is hoped that they will be of interest; but nothing ever interests all the people all the time and here we are intent on practising skills that are as valuable in reading about astronomy as zoology—and even about art and politics as well. Experience shows that students quickly appreciate this point when it is explained to them.

2.2 Exploitation

The exercises have been developed in a conscious attempt to practise the skills and processes involved in a range of reading activities.

The basic ideas about the nature of the reading process derive from an article by Julian Dakin (*The Teaching of Reading* in 'Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of English' ed. Fraser and O'Donnell. Longman, 1969).

Dakin suggests that there are three elements involved in reading, i.e. *recognition* of the visual input; *structuring* of the input into meaningful stretches; *interpretation* of the input. It is these processes which form the focus of the exercises. In fact of course, (as Dakin recognizes), these processes usually occur virtually simultaneously and the relationships between them are complex; the three are often interdependent so that each involves the others. For this reason, the framework presented in this material is, strictly speaking, over-simple. Its value, however, lies in the pedagogical relationship which it fosters between an underlying theory and the practicalities of the classroom, where a focusing on a particular aspect of the reading process is often useful.

These basic reading processes are developed in the context of a variety of types of reading. The idea that people read in different ways using different strategies and skills when reading for different purposes is a relatively familiar one, but many foreign language learning materials allow practice only of one type: slow, careful and laboured searching through a text in order to extract the maximum of information from it.

This material aims to develop an active reader who can vary his approach and strategy according to his needs at a particular time. Some of the skills developed are:

- Prediction about what is coming next in a sentence, a paragraph or a longer text.
- Search reading: looking through a text to locate specific information.
- Speed reading: concentrating on reading a passage quickly to extract the gist.
- Surveying: looking over a text to see in general what it is about.
- Scanning: looking quickly through a text to locate specific known formulations.
- An awareness of *cohesion*: the ways in which the forms of the language are used to tie together ideas and build up stretches of the text.