

Reading and Thinking
in English

**Discourse
in action**

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Teacher's
edition

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Reading and Thinking in English was developed in a project sponsored jointly by the University of the Andes, Bogotá, Colombia, and the British Overseas Development Ministry in association with the British Council.

The Director of the project was John Moore, of the British Council. **Discourse in action** was prepared for publication by John Moore, using materials written as a part of the Reading and Thinking in English project. The members of the University who participated in writing these materials were Dora Bonnet de Salgado, Luisa Fernanda de Knight, Anita Escobar de Tamayo and Teresa Munévar M. These materials were subsequently revised and extended by John Moore for this edition.

Professor H. G. Widdowson (of the University of London Institute of Education) is the Associate Editor of Reading and Thinking in English.

Reading and Thinking in English

Reading and Thinking in English is an integrated course in reading comprehension for students of English as a foreign language. It is based on the belief that a special kind of course is required for students of English whose main need is to gain access to information through English. The course has been designed for a wide range of learners whose needs can be described as 'English for Academic Purposes'—secondary school pupils, students in universities and other tertiary institutions, adults whose profession requires them to make use of material in English. It is therefore intended to help students and others read textbooks, works of reference and general academic interest, sourcebooks and journals in English.

The series consists of four books. **Concepts in use** extends students' basic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and how they are used to express fundamental concepts. It also develops their awareness of how passages are built on combinations of these concepts. **Exploring functions** deals with the use of concepts in the communicative functions of academic writing. **Discovering discourse** develops students' awareness of how the devices of language are used to express communicative function. It also shows how passages are built on combinations of simple functions. **Discourse in action** extends students' knowledge of the functional organization of written English and develops their ability to handle information found in varied types of real academic discourse. The series is designed so that the books in it can be used independently of the others in the series. Many intermediate or advanced learners may be able to begin with the third or fourth books. The whole series, however, provides a phased approach to the most challenging demands of academic discourse.

Self-study guide

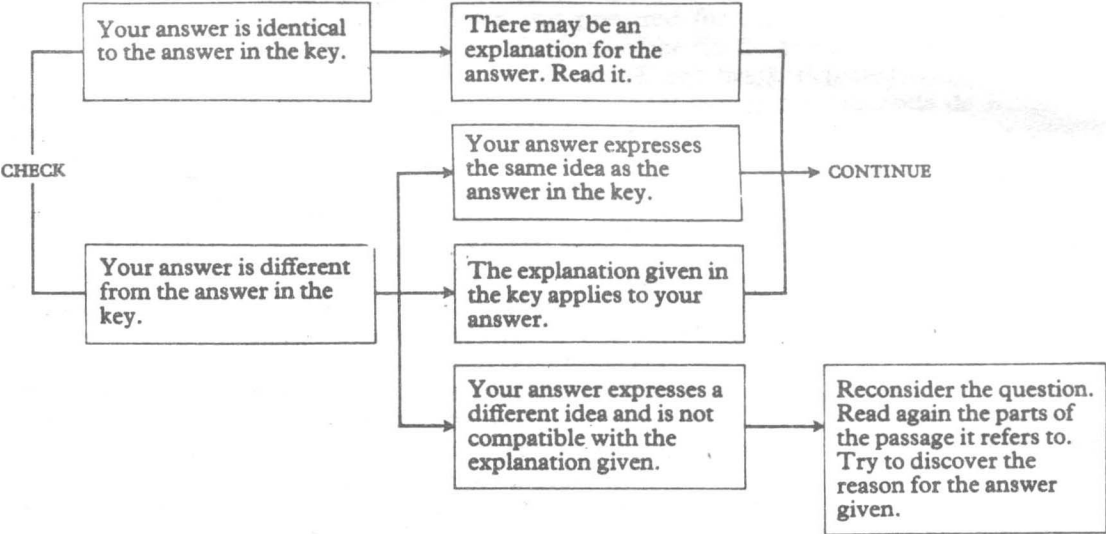
Discourse in action has been designed to allow students to study independently in class. It can also be used by students working individually for self-study. These notes suggest study methods for students who are not using the book with a teacher in class.

Study methods

- 1 Read the Teacher's guide carefully. This section describes the aims of the book, its approach and purpose, how the book and the units are constructed. It lists the reading activities practised and describes the types of exercises used. It is important that you should have a clear idea of the aims and characteristics of the book before you begin to study it. Try and relate the individual exercises to the general aims of the book. This will help you understand why you are doing a particular kind of exercise. The book is based on the belief that the student will make more progress if he understands what he is doing and why he is doing it.
- 2 Be prepared to think carefully about individual exercises. The tasks are not mechanical: they require you to grasp the ideas that are expressed by a variety of passages in English. The authors believe that reading comprehension cannot be improved at an advanced level unless practice in the understanding of grammar and vocabulary is combined with careful consideration of the ideas expressed and the way passages are constructed to develop these ideas.
- 3 Try to study regularly. It is better to work for a short time regularly than to rely on occasional, longer study periods. You will find that the units are divided up into a number of short steps to enable you to plan your work more easily.
- 4 Study the units and the individual parts of units in the order in which they are given in the book. Activities have been designed to lead up to the following work and to make use of what has been covered in previous exercises, so it will be confusing if you attempt to change the order or omit exercises. The only activities which you may have to omit are the follow-up activities at the end of each unit as these are designed for group work.

Using the key

After each exercise (or each section of a long reading passage) look at the answers given in the key. Check the answers you gave.



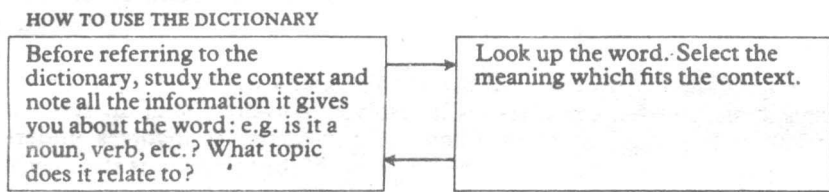
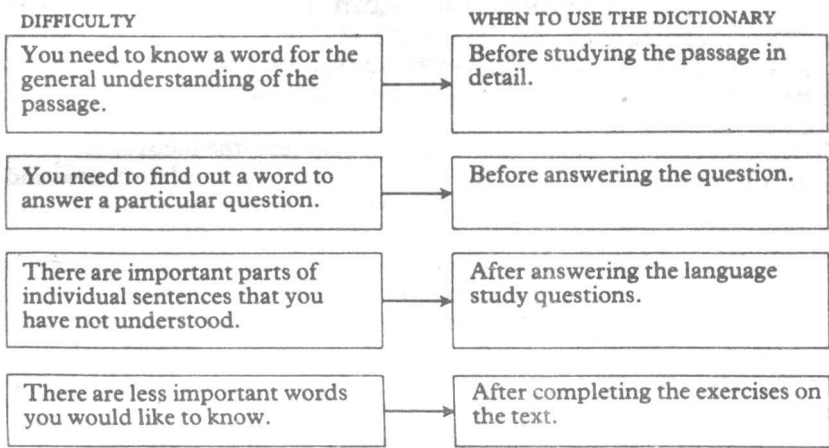
Remember that the answer in the key is not the only correct answer. You may have a different answer which is equally acceptable. If you find an exercise particularly difficult, consider very carefully the reasons for the answers in the key.

Use a separate notebook for the exercises that require written answers. Whether the exercise is answered in a single word, a phrase or complete sentences, try to develop the habit of checking the correctness of the English you have written before looking at the key.

Using a dictionary

You will need to use a good monolingual dictionary such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. A useful complement to this dictionary is the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* by A. P. Cowie and R. Mackin.

When is it necessary to use a dictionary?



Never read word by word, using the dictionary for everything you do not understand.

If you can, make contact with someone else who is using the book on his own and meet regularly to work with him and discuss your ideas and problems as you go along. The book is not mechanical; each task requires critical thought and is open to discussion.

Teacher's guide

1 Purpose and approach

Discourse in action is based on the belief that advanced learners of English for study purposes read not as an end in itself but in order to perform a range of activities that are part of their studies. The book therefore concentrates on improving students' abilities to extract information from written discourse in order to write a report or take part in discussion and other realistic study activities.

Whilst reading is practised in a real-life context, the focus remains on extending students' abilities to handle different types of discourse and to make use of a variety of skills necessary for critical and creative reading. One of the keys to successful reading at an advanced level is to be able to judge the writer's position in relation to the information he is presenting. This involves recognizing whether the writer is presenting information in the form of established facts; whether he is presenting hypotheses, asking questions, considering possible answers, making tentative statements; whether he is supporting or attacking particular points of view or positions. In advanced academic writing, writers are more often questioning and discussing than merely stating facts and this is why *Discourse in action* introduces the particular features found in these types of discourse.

The process of understanding not only *what* a writer says but *why* he says it and on what basis he says it involves an awareness of the relation between the ideas or propositions of a passage. It involves understanding when a writer is rephrasing or modifying a previous statement. It also involves understanding the assumptions a writer is making, the imaginary questions and objections he is answering. Thus there must be an awareness of not only what the writer says but of what he does *not* say. The practice activities in *Discourse in action* systematically provide opportunities to discover these types of relations which we will call propositional relations. They are designed to enable students not just to look at passages, but to 'see through' them. An ability to read in this way is clearly essential if students are to achieve the independence of learning required in higher education.

Discourse in action develops both the ability to perceive the ways writers present and organize information in academic discourse, and the particular reading skills which are necessary to interpret passages and read creatively. It practises making inferences and understanding implications, drawing on the experience and knowledge of the reader to evaluate a passage and decide how to make use of the information in it for particular purposes. Clearly this process of discovering meanings and interpreting passages in the light of one's own background has to go hand in hand with an accurate understanding of information given

explicitly in the passage. In order to achieve this necessary balance, the practice activities consistently require the student to use the passage as a starting point, refer back to it and justify his own interpretation of it.

The book is designed to give practice not only in specific features of academic discourse and specific reading skills but also requires the reader to select from a very wide range of skills and take responsibility for deciding how to tackle reading problems. The reading matter is related to contemporary topics which are likely to appeal to students and adults who may wish to improve their reading both for study purposes and for pleasure. The topics cover a wide range of disciplines with an emphasis on technology and the environment, and include controversial subjects in present-day society.

2 Design of the book

Discourse in action is divided into two phases. Phase 1 begins with an introductory unit which focuses the student's attention on the way specific features of discourse and reading skills are practised in the context of communicative activities. The remaining three units in the first phase each deal with a particular type of discourse and develop appropriate reading skills and understanding of propositional relations appropriate to that type of discourse. For example, Unit 2 (Exposition) deals with expository discourse. After presenting this type of discourse realized in passages showing different ways of making, amplifying and rejecting explanations, the unit introduces the propositional relation of equivalent meanings. It then develops the reading skill of inference by practising ways of inferring causal relations in passages.

Phase 2 consists of three units each devoted to a particular study activity involving reading, bringing in the full range of discourse types and reading skills and thus providing a round-up not just to the book but to the course as a whole.

3 Design of the units

Phase 1

Each unit in Phase 1 consists of four parts, the final part containing the main reading passage. The four parts are: preparation, abstract, expansion and reading assignment. The unit is introduced with a brief summary of the contents.

The preparation contains a number of short passages and activities designed to draw students' attention to three main ways of realizing a

particular type of discourse. For example, Unit 4 (Argument) presents information in passages and diagrams which the student has to use to express a point of view, to defend and to attack a position.

The **abstract** is a brief passage containing information which forms the basis of the main reading passage in the unit. The abstract contains the realizations of the type of discourse introduced in the preparation stage and is accompanied by questions designed to make students aware of the structure of the information in the abstract. For example, Unit 4 presents an abstract of the main passage on Intermediate Technology and the questions lead students to identify definitions given and implied, the writer's arguments in favour of intermediate technology and his discussion and rejection of arguments against it.

The **expansion** forms a transition from the abstract to the main passage. It expands the information given in the abstract in two ways. First, it encourages students to discover a number of propositional relations based on information given in the abstract. Secondly, it leads students to make inferences from information given in the abstract. In these ways, students are prepared for the main passage by manipulating its information content in the expansion stage. For example, in Unit 4 this stage expands the abstract by practising the propositional relations of contrast and compromise and also develops the ability to infer a writer's points of view.

The **reading assignment** is divided into 6 sections:

- 1 **Prediction.** The questions in this section are designed to enable students to use their knowledge and understanding of the previous parts of the unit to predict the way in which the main passage will be developed.
- 2 **Extensive reading.** Students are given practice in skimming parts of the passage to identify important ideas developed in it and in scanning to pick out points of detail.
- 3 **Intensive reading.** This section, containing questions on specific statements in the passage, is designed to help students understand sections of the passage more closely by picking up references across sentences, by recognizing implications and by coping with long and complex sentence structures. The questions are numbered and are in the left-hand margin near that part of the passage to which they correspond (see page 18).
- 4 **Information retrieval.** Once they have studied the passage closely,

students are guided to use information in it to make brief summaries or transfer information to diagrams and tables.

- 5 **Evaluation.** This section is intended to exercise students' abilities to read critically and express opinions on the passage. In particular, it makes use of the technique of requiring students to compare the passage they have read with another passage giving differing or contrary information or points of view.
- 6 **Follow-up.** The final section of the unit presents students with a challenging activity in which they make use of and extend the information they have manipulated during the preceding parts of the unit. It provides opportunities for them to exercise their ability to handle the discourse type, and appropriate propositional relations, as well as exercising the skills of interpretation in the context of lively activities requiring independent contributions. For example, in Unit 1 students undertake their own information search in order to present a critical assessment of the main reading passage. In Unit 2 students play 'Snakes and Ladders', a popular game with a board and dice and interpret the results in the light of relations introduced in the unit. In Unit 3 students perform an experiment which requires them to interpret a passage by using procedures associated with the enquiry type of discourse. In Unit 4 students take part in a role-playing exercise in which they express, defend and attack particular points of view.

Phase 2

Each unit in Phase 2 begins with a summary of the unit containing information to help students understand not only what they are required to do but also the type of passage they will be working with. The units each consist of a single reading assignment. The nature of this assignment is explained in the aim of the unit. The summary then lists the topic, the source of the passage, the context in which it was written (i.e. what kind of reader it was intended for) and the type of writing it involves. The summary then explains the nature of the reading assignment.

The three assignments in Phase 2 differ in terms of:

- a The type of passage. Phase 2 includes textbook and sourcebook passages as well as extracts from a wide variety of sources including newspaper articles, publicity material, technical journals etc. Students encounter exposition, enquiry and argument in juxtaposition.
- b The type of activity. These are writing a report, making notes for a class discussion and making a summary.

In order to do the assignment, students follow the steps which are set out in the unit. In Units 5 and 6 these steps are:

- 1 Reading predictions. The topics in Phase 2 have been chosen in order to explore subjects of interest to students and about which they already have ideas and opinions. It is also expected that students will be familiar with a variety of ways of organizing information. The reading predictions section therefore contains questions to prepare students for the passage by using their existing knowledge of the subject matter of the passage and ways in which information might be organized in it.
- 2 Extensive reading. It is particularly important that when reading long passages students should be able to pick out the main features of the passage by skimming rapidly through it. The extensive reading section is designed to help them exercise this skill and is followed by the passage itself.

Steps 3–6 come after the passage.

- 3 Planning the assignment. This step suggests ways of organizing information in the assignment and allows students to select their own organization. It is important that they should do this in order to construct an original assignment and not to try and use the same organization as in the passage itself. What they are required to do in the assignment is to fit information given in the passage into a different structure and to complement information given in the passage with their own research. They are not, however, expected to use their own words but to select appropriate bits of information and link them together.
- 4 Information collection. Students' attention is diverted to parts of the passage where they will find information of relevance to their assignment and they are given practice in extracting and evaluating the information in the passage.
- 5 Carrying out the assignment. This step gives further advice on how to organize the assignment.
- 6 Follow-up. This final step provides a similar type of activity to those used in the follow-up section of Phase 1.

Unit 7 consists of just two parts. The preparation consists of questions to be answered by extensive reading. Carrying out the assignment gives precise instructions on the task for the unit.

4 Reading activities and skills

Discourse in action deliberately covers a wide variety of activities involving reading which are designed to provide both guidance and challenge to advanced students. The activities include:

- selecting information from a passage or diagram to complete statements
- completing summaries of passages in the form of statements or diagrams
- selecting information from a passage and writing it in note form
- matching statements to related statements
- identifying the logical relationship between statements
- writing notes to answer questions
- using information in statements to write related statements
- writing questions to clarify information given in a passage
- comparing two passages and noting similarities and differences in the ideas and information given in them
- playing a board game which involves understanding written instructions and descriptions of events and arranging them in the form of a report
- writing a letter using information given in a passage
- discussing the content of passages and expressing opinions on the arguments developed in them
- using information in a passage to perform an experiment
- extending and complementing information given in a passage by personal research
- using information given in short passages and diagrams to take part in role-playing discussions and to write a report following the discussion
- selecting information from a passage to fit a particular logical structure and using the information to write a report with that structure
- selecting information from a passage to support a particular point of view
- writing a summary of arguments contained in a wide variety of short passages.

Many of these activities require oral or written work in addition to reading. The authors believe that reading at an advanced level should not be developed in isolation from the other skills and that students should be made aware of the communicative resources of English underlying all the skills.

It will be seen that none of these activities are mechanical; they all demand skills of critical interpretation. These skills include the following:

- inferring from a passage the context in which it was written
- extracting from a passage the most important information for a particular purpose
- understanding relations between statements such as cause-effect, general-specific, equivalence in meaning
- assessing whether the information given in a passage is adequate for a particular purpose
- skimming a passage to identify general ideas and information
- scanning to locate specific details
- using one's own knowledge, opinions and imagination to provide information related to that given in a passage
- inferring from information in a passage causes, reasons, results, conclusions, opinions, specific instances, general statements
- inferring from information in a passage relevant information which is not given
- predicting how a passage will continue
- identifying the topic of a passage
- understanding complex sentence structure
- understanding relations between statements in a passage
- understanding whether a statement supports, modifies or contradicts another statement
- distinguishing statements of fact from beliefs, hypotheses and expressions of probability, uncertainty etc.
- identifying statements which are logically consistent, which are in agreement or which conflict with each other
- inferring from information given, statements which are in agreement, are logically consistent or in conflict.

While some activities emphasize one of the above skills more than others, the authors believe that it is not possible to develop the skills in isolation, and most activities involve a range of skills as does any realistic reading activity.

5 How to use the book

Distribution of time

When used in a formal class the book has been designed to occupy about 60 class periods of 50 minutes each. In addition it is recommended that one out-of-class assignment should be given for every 2-3 class periods. The out-of-class assignments may include completing written work, consulting other sources, preparing for class discussions, and studying intensively the reading passages. Encourage students to make a note of difficulties and arrange to deal with these in class. Identify the difficulties which recur and discuss these with the whole class. If

students do not prepare the reading passages or study them intensively out of class it will probably be necessary to allow more time than that suggested. It is particularly important that in Phase 2 students should come to class prepared for the assignment and ready to discuss difficulties they are having. In this way, class time can be reserved as much as possible for activities benefiting from interaction between students and teacher. The following pattern is suggested:

Phase 1 units—up to 10 class hours each including discussion of students' difficulties plus 4–5 hours of out-of-class assignments per unit including preparation and intensive study of reading passage.

Phase 2 units—5–7 class hours each plus about 2–3 hours out-of-class work.

Classroom management

The two main assumptions behind the use of Discourse in action in class are:

- 1 Development of reading skills at this level and particularly the study of long reading passages requires a great deal of individual work.
- 2 Students' ability to read critically and creatively can be greatly extended through group activities which involve, for example, using a reading passage to justify a position or perform a particular task.

As mentioned above, it is important that from the first unit students should be encouraged to read the passages independently. Discourage them from reading word by word, aiming to understand the whole passage in one go. As an alternative, point out the value of reading with a purpose and make sure they read the passage selectively in order to answer a particular question in the book. This will involve reading the passage several times but as they do this they will build up their understanding of the passage in a jigsaw fashion more meaningfully than in word-by-word reading. The most effective use of class time is for problem-solving sessions on either a group or an individual basis, as suggested above.

The value of group activities is that interaction between members of the group encourages interaction between the reader and the passage. The size of the groups will depend on the nature of the task but it should be between four and six students. It is not necessary for groups to consist always of the same students—indeed varying the groups can be beneficial. Except in the follow-up activities, it is preferable for students to have the opportunity first to work on a task individually and

then to discuss their conclusions. This should be followed by brief comments as a whole class. Pair work is also recommended for the type of problem requiring careful consideration.

The following sequence of activities is suggested:

1	Contents	Individual	Students read silently. Teacher deals with problems.
2	Preparation and Abstract	Whole class	Teacher elicits information as a motivation to the unit topic or discourse type.
	Expansion	Individual/ group/class or pair/class	Students work on activities on their own and compare conclusions in group discussion. The amount of time needed for discussion will depend on how open-ended the activity is—see individual unit notes.
3	Reading assignment		
	Predicting the development	See unit notes	As expansion above.
	Extensive reading	Individual/class	A quick check with the whole class should be sufficient.
	Intensive reading	Individual	Deal only with recurring problems in class.
	Information retrieval	Individual/class	Occasionally group discussion will be of value (see individual unit notes).
	Evaluation	Individual/ group/class	Allow students to prepare the task individually.
	Follow-up	Group	This may be followed by a brief class round-up.

**Background
reading**

This book is based on a communicative approach to reading and language teaching. The teacher will find useful background reading on these two aspects in the following books:

Leech & Svartvik *A Communicative Grammar of English* LONGMAN

F. Smith *Comprehension and Learning* HOLT RINEHART

D. Wilkins *Notional Syllabuses* OUP

M. Coulthard *Introduction to Discourse Analysis* LONGMAN

H. G. Widdowson *Teaching Language as Communication* OUP

H. G. Widdowson *Explorations in Applied Linguistics* OUP

Halliday & Hasan *Cohesion in English* LONGMAN

Open University Reading Development Course *The Reading Process*
OPEN UNIVERSITY