

DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

beginning

Linda Markstein



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**The Borough of Manhattan Community College
The City University of New York**



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INTRODUCTION

Developing Reading Skills: Beginning is part of a reading skills development series specially designed for adults and secondary students who are learning English as a second or foreign language. This book is the first level of a developmental reading series which includes:

Developing Reading Skills: Intermediate

Expanding Reading Skills: Intermediate

Developing Reading Skills: Advanced

Expanding Reading Skills: Advanced

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Developing Reading Skills: Beginning contains five units, and each unit has three reading passages that are integrated by a common theme. Exercises following the passages develop and extend comprehension through a variety of reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities.

RATIONALE FOR MATERIALS DESIGN

The materials design for *Developing Reading Skills: Beginning* has been heavily inspired by Jerome Bruner's spiral curriculum model. For the last 30 years, Bruner has repeatedly emphasized two important pedagogical points:

1. any subject that is worth knowing about can, at some meaningful level, be made accessible to students at any age, or skill level;
2. a topic that is given time and place in the curriculum must be a topic that can be expanded and elaborated so as to be worthy of the serious attention of a thoughtful adult.

These two points have strong implications for ESL/EFL materials design, and they have guided the basic design of these materials.

To create ESL materials worthy of the serious attention of a thoughtful adult, Bruner's thematic spiral design is especially effective. Essentially, this means that a unit introduces a theme on a very simple level and then gradually and systematically expands the unit theme on higher levels. For example, the first reading passage in each unit is linguistically and conceptually extremely simple. The exercises following this passage help the reader consolidate and develop meaning. Then, the unit theme is introduced again in a second passage related thematically to the first passage. This second passage is more challenging conceptually and linguistically than the first passage; again the exercises following the passage help the reader consolidate and develop meaning. Finally, the third reading passage in each unit challenges the reader at a considerably higher linguistic and conceptual level.

The thematic spiral is a very efficient and effective design for ESL/EFL students because it is constantly recycling and building upon concepts, vocabulary, and structures that have previously been introduced. The end result is that in a relatively short amount of time, beginning students of English are able to read intermediate level passages, and this accomplishment provides them not only with pride but with a powerful incentive to continue their language learning efforts.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The materials in *Developing Reading Skills: Beginning* can be flexibly adapted to various instructional modes: individual, pair, small group, and large group depending upon the class instructional objectives. However, whenever possible, it is recommended that pair and small group instruction be used to maximize communication opportunities for each student in the classroom.

Each unit has four major parts and one short wrap-up:

1. Pre-reading discussion questions, first reading passage, and exercises;
2. Second reading passage and exercises;
3. Third reading passage and exercises;
4. Expansion activities: Interview and small group interaction; writing task
5. Wrap-up: Analysis of quotations on the theme of the unit.

Approximately two to three hours are needed to cover each of these major parts (10–15 hours per unit) although there is considerable variation from student to student. Some parts can be assigned as homework.

1. *Pre-reading discussion questions*: These questions are designed to introduce the unit theme to the readers and to help them relate their prior knowledge and experience to this theme. Teachers can ask the questions, or students can ask each other these questions in pairs or small groups.
2. *Reading passages #1, #2 and #3*: Each passage should be read three times:

First Reading: Getting the Main Idea

Students should be encouraged to read through the entire passage without stopping to look up unfamiliar words in the glossary or in a dictionary. They should be allowed to do the first reading at their own speed, no matter how slow that speed may be. (*Note*: As students progress through the book and increase their knowledge of English, their reading speed will naturally increase. The most important point in the first reading is to keep the anxiety level as low as possible.)

Second Reading: Filling in the Gaps

After the students have read through the passage once for the main ideas, they should go back and read the passage a second time. Then, they can work with a partner to look up words in the glossary at the end of the book or in a dictionary. Students should be allowed to use bilingual dictionaries if they wish.

Third Reading: Consolidating Conceptual and Linguistic Information

Finally, the students should read over the passage a third time to consolidate the conceptual and linguistic information from the first two readings and to integrate new words into their contexts. This third reading can gradually be developed into a skimming activity, but we caution teachers not to emphasize speed until the students are ready for this challenge. (*Note*: Some students will be ready sooner than others. If it is possible, these individual differences should be noted and accommodated.)

3. *Comprehension, Discussion, Cloze and Making Inferences Exercises*: Students working together in pairs or small groups derive maximum benefit from these communication activities. The *Comprehension Questions* concentrate on identifying main ideas and important details and on building semantic clusters. General class discussion of answers is suggested.

The guided discussion exercise helps students relate the unit themes to their own experience as they did with the pre-reading questions. At this point, however, they can give more expansive answers, discussing them in small groups.

The cloze exercise is designed to help students become aware of the semantic and syntactic signals and ties of written discourse. Students can heighten their own linguistic awareness by working in pairs, explaining why certain options work in particular frames and others do not.

The exercise on making inferences appears after the third reading in each unit. It demands more critical thinking of students.

In general, the exercises following each reading passage perform two major functions:

1. They tie together concepts and linguistic information from the previous reading.
2. They set the stage for the next reading, which will elaborate on themes presented in the earlier passage.

Sequencing is very important in these materials, and the materials should be used in the given order whenever possible.

4. *The Interview*: The interview activity gives students the opportunity to adapt creatively and build upon a major unit theme. The interview development procedures are carefully spelled out in each unit itself. Basically, by collaborating in developing interview formats, students receive practice in general information elicitation techniques, a very important language skill for anyone, but certainly of particular significance for beginning level ESL/EFL students. Working together, students develop questions beyond those provided in the text.

Interviewing can be anxiety-provoking for many, if not most, beginning level students, but careful preparation for the interview greatly reduces this anxiety. It is recommended that students give their interview reports in small groups, at least in the beginning, or until they feel more comfortable speaking in English. However, students can be asked to volunteer to report to the whole group if they wish. Some are ready for this challenge very quickly, and these students can serve as role models for the shyer students. As a final note, we caution that a supportive atmosphere is essential in this activity, and the focus should clearly be upon process rather than product. In the testing phase of these materials, students enjoyed the challenge of this activity and they made considerable gains in self-confidence and language learning in this area over time.

5. *Challenge Activity: The Writing Task:* This is an activity designed to challenge the faster students; however, the process of developing and writing a report is of great value to all students in the class. More time will be needed by slower students in this activity. They can be paired with faster students, at least initially, for support.

If there is a library in or near the school, it is very helpful to the students to take them on a library tour. Ideally, one class period could be spent in the library working directly under the teacher's supervision in order to orient students to the library and to the ways of looking up basic information.

The Wrap-Up Activity—Quotations: At the end of every unit, there are several quotations that relate in some way to the unit theme. Students can work together in pairs or small groups to figure out the meaning of each quotation and a paraphrase for the quotation. Students can also be asked to translate related quotations from their cultures.

CONCLUSION

In the testing phase of *Developing Reading Skills: Beginning*, students were encouraged to supplement each unit by bringing related newspaper and magazine articles to class. Students borrowed these articles from the files to read during free periods. Referring to one of these supplementary readings, a student wrote in her journal: "Today I read interesting article from the *Time* magazine. I do not understand all, but I understand almost all. And I do not agree." Finally, acknowledgment is again given to Jerome Bruner and the spiral curriculum model for making adult mainstream reading even moderately accessible to beginning level ESL/EFL students.

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Names and Naming Customs

Before You Begin

Discuss these questions with your class.

What is your name?

What is your family name? Is it a common name?

What is your given name? Does it mean something?

What does it mean?

What is a custom?

23-21-46

File No. 10568

Certification of Birth

This is to certify that: Andrew Alan Dale

was born in City of Urbana County of Champaign, State of Illinois

on July 5, 1963 Sex Male

I hereby certify that the above information was taken from the birth record of the above named individual which was filed in this office in accordance with "The Law to Provide for the Registration of All Births, Stillbirths and Deaths in the State of Illinois."

William Tarrant Dale Father's Name
Edsel Hayward Mother's Maiden Name

Signed John P. Hill County Clerk
Champaign County, Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

Filed August 7, 1963

John P. Hill Date June 27 19 65
County Clerk

First Reading of *What's Your Name?:* Getting the Main Idea

Read through the whole passage. Don't stop to look up new words. Do the first reading at your own speed.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

What is the first thing you want to know about someone?

"What's your name?"

Names are important. Names are special. "Your name?" is the first question on a job or school application.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT	FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	
Possible Work Locations	Possible Positions		Work Location	Rate
		(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)	Position	Date
<small>To Applicant: We deeply appreciate your interest in our organization and assure you that we are sincerely interested in your qualifications. A clear understanding of your background and work history will aid us in placing you in the position that best meets your qualifications and may assist us in possible future upgrading.</small>		PERSONAL	Date	
Name _____		Social Security No. _____		
Last First Middle		Telephone No. _____		
Present address _____		City State Zip		
Do you have any physical condition which may limit your ability to perform the particular job for which you are applying? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		If yes, describe such condition _____		
What method of transportation will you use to get to work? _____		Rate of pay expected \$ _____ per week		
Position(s) applied for _____		Would you work Full-Time _____ Part-Time _____ Specify days and hours if part time _____		

Everyone in the world has a name. Most people have two names or more. They have a family name and a given name. Examples of family names are Gonzales, Jones, and Chang. Reynaldo, Anne, and Mei are examples of given names.

Every society has its own customs about names. These customs are not the same in all societies. In

many countries, people write the family name first and then their given name or names. Here is an example:

Shin Po Kwun

The family name is “Shin,” and the given names are “Po Kwun.” This is a Chinese name. In China, they write or say the family name first and then the given names. This is also the custom in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and many other countries around the world.

In English-speaking countries, England, Canada, and the United States, for example, people write their given name (or names) first. Then they write their family name:



Michael Jackson



Meryl Streep

“Michael” and “Meryl” are given names, and “Jackson” and “Streep” are family names.

FAMILY NAMES

In most countries, the family name is the father’s family name. For example, a father’s family name is “Odabashian.” The family name is also “Oda-bashian.” A father’s family name is “Han,” and the family name is “Han.”

In some countries, the mother's family name is also part of the child's family name. This is true in Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries. This is José. His father's family name is "Fernández," and his mother's family name is "Clemente." His family name is "Fernández Clemente." So his full name is José Fernández Clemente.



These were the most common family names in the United States in 1974:

1. Smith
2. Johnson
3. Williams
4. Brown
5. Jones



In 1770, more than 200 years ago, the most common names in the United States were:

1. Smith
2. Jones
3. Brown
4. Williams
5. Allen

As you can see, most of the popular family names from 1770 are popular today in the United States.

The most common family names of Hispanics (people who speak Spanish) in the United States are:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Rodriguez | 6. Hernández |
| 2. González | 7. Pérez |
| 3. García | 8. Sánchez |
| 4. López | 9. Torres |
| 5. Rivera | 10. Ortiz |

“Chang” is the most common family name in the world. Chang is a Chinese name. It means “always” or “all the time.” In Korea, the most common family name is “Kim.” It means “gold.” Other common

Korean names are "Rhee," "Ahn," and "Park." In Vietnam, the most common family name is "Tran." Other common family names are "Nguyen," "Thieu," and "Van."

People sometimes say "last name" for "family name" in English-speaking cultures. "Last name" and "family name" mean the same thing in these cultures.

Second Reading: Filling in the Gaps

Read the passage a second time. Now, work with a partner. Guess the meaning of new words from context. Then look them up in the glossary or in a dictionary.

Third Reading: Putting the Information Together

Read the passage through a third time. Think about the meaning of the new words in their context in the passage. Read the passage as quickly as you can. Don't stop at new words.

1. Comprehension Questions

Circle the letter of the correct or best answer. Discuss your answers with your class.

1. "The most common name in the world is Chang." This means
 - a. many people in the world have this name.
 - b. a few people in the world have this name.
 - c. many people like this name.

2. What does the name “Kim” mean?
 - a. Korean
 - b. Gold
 - c. Always
3. “Hispanic” means a person who speaks:
 - a. English
 - b. Spanish
 - c. Arabic
4. In English-speaking countries, how do people write their names?
 - a. Family name and then given names: Jones Jennifer
 - b. Given names and then family name: Jennifer Sue Jones
 - c. With both the mother’s and the father’s family names: Jennifer Jones Smith
5. In English-speaking countries, the “last name” is
 - a. the given name.
 - b. the first name.
 - c. the family name.

2. Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions in small groups. Then write your answers after the questions.

1. What is your family name? _____
2. What is your given name? _____
Do you have more than one given name?

3. In your country, do people write their given name or their family name first?
