Which different reading skills should students practise and when should they practise them? This lesson will give you a clearer idea about how to find your way around reading skills.

> Task 1 – A short quiz.

How many questions can you answer?

    1. Are skim and scan reading the same thing?

    2. Are gist and skim reading more or less the same thing?

    3. Can you infer meaning before you read?

    4. Do you typically scan a bus timetable?

    5. What kind of text do you typically read extensively?

Check your answers in the key below.

Task 1 Feedback

1. No   4. Yes

2. Yes   5. A novel

3. Not usually, no

If you got 2 or more answer wrong, or you are uncertain about some of the terminology in this lesson, then this lesson will definitely help you!

> Task 2 – Defining the sub-skills

Look at different reading sub-skills and strategies 1 - 7.
Match the definitions a – g below with the correct sub-skill.

Reading sub-skills and strategies	Definitions
1. prediction	
2. skim reading	
3. gist reading	
4. scan reading	
5. intensive reading	
6. inferring meaning	
7. extensive reading	

Definitions

a. Reading to get detailed information from the text.

b. Reading a text to locate a specific piece of information such as a word or a number or a time. It is not necessary to understand the whole text in order to do this.

c. Either guessing the meaning of new vocabulary in a text or understanding meaning or a message in the text that is not immediately obvious.

d. Reading to get a general but not detailed understanding of the text.

e. Also reading to get an overall but not detailed understanding of the text.

f. Reading longer texts frequently over a period of time. This is usually done independently and not in the classroom.

g. Looking at headlines, pictures, typeface and layout to guess what you think a text will be about.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key skill

When we read in our first language, we read in different ways. When students start reading in a second language they need to re-learn different ways of reading. Teachers need to know about these different reading skills so they can develop them in the classroom.

Task 3 – Which sub-skill for which text?

Read the description of the different texts and the motivations for reading (a – h) below. Decide which reading sub-skills and strategies (1 – 7) you would probably use to read each. Write the number of the sub-skill / strategy in the second column. You will need to use some of the skills more than once, and some texts may use more than one skill.

Texts and the motivations for reading	Sub-skills / Strategies
eg. *A novel that you are really enjoying*	7
a. A job advertisement for a job that you are really interested in.	
b. A couple of unknown words in a text that is included in an exam you are doing.	
c. A telephone directory.	
d. The editorial of a newspaper that you are not familiar with and whose political viewpoint you would like to understand.	
e. A series of articles, only some of which will be useful to you, for a report you're writing.	
f. Instructions for kitset furniture you are assembling (you are usually not very good at doing this!)	
g. A travel brochure when you are trying to decide on a holiday destination.	
h. An armchair travel book about a country you have enjoyed visiting.	
i. An online flight timetable.	

Reading sub-skills and strategies

1. Prediction.
2. Skim reading.
3. Gist reading.
4. Scan reading.
5. Intensive reading.
6. Inferring meaning (of vocabulary in context, or of the writer's point of view).
7. Extensive reading.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 4 – Which task type for which skill?

Letters a – h show some typical reading tasks or instructions for reading texts in different ways. Match them with the reading sub-skills and strategies from the previous exercise (1-7) above.

Typical reading tasks or instructions	Reading sub-skills
a. Does John go overseas before or after finishing his degree?	
b. Talk about the headline and pictures and decide what you think the article will say.	
c. Does this article discuss a problem and offer a solution, or does it talk about 2 different points of view?	
d. Look at the words immediately before and after and see if they can help you guess the meaning.	
e. The government will change the law in the near future TRUE/FALSE	
f. Find the best times for leaving and returning.	
g. Do you think the writer of the letter supports the City Council or not? Why do you think so?	
h. Complete the following table by making notes on all the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

➲ Thinking about your teaching …

It is useful to think about why you read different texts every day and how you read them. Over a defined period of time such as a week, keep a list of different texts you read and the way in which you read them.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

➲ Taking it to the classroom …

Whenever you get students to read in the classroom, it is useful to ask yourself what reading skills you are practising and developing. Sometimes at the end of a reading lesson you can get students to reflect on the way they have read in class and suggest they use the same skills and strategies outside the classroom.

➲ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 184 to 191 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on practising and developing reading skills with learners.

On pages 283 to 287 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on reading sub-skills and strategies.

See also section 8 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

➲ Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

• **Unit 3 d) Reading 2: Setting tasks for reading texts** (*a useful follow-up to this lesson, on creating tasks to help learners with reading texts*)
• **Unit 3 a) Listening 1**: **Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson** (*a lesson on another aspect of receptive skills*)

Answer Key 🔑

Task 2 – Feedback

1) g
2) d
3) e
4) b
5) a
6) c
7) f

Task 3 - Feedback

a. A job advertisement for a job that you are really interested in.
Detailed reading – your interest in the job means you will want to understand as much as possible.

b. A couple of unknown words in a text that is included in an exam you are doing.
Inferring meaning (guessing vocabulary in context) – it is unlikely that you will have a dictionary in an exam and it is important that you try and understand these words.

c. A telephone directory.
Scan reading – you will only want to locate the number or name that you are looking for.

d. The editorial of a newspaper that you are not familiar with and whose political viewpoint you would like to understand.
Inferring meaning (working out the message) – the political opinion of the editorial may not be immediately obvious.

e. A series of articles only some of which will be useful to you for a report you're writing.
Skim or gist reading – not all the articles will be useful to you, so you do not want to waste time reading them all in detail.

f. Instructions for kitset furniture you are assembling (you are usually not very good at doing this!)
Detailed reading – if you are not good at assembling kitsets, you will want to be sure you follow the instructions carefully.

g. A travel brochure when you are trying to decide on a holiday destination.
Both skim and scan – you are likely to scan for destination names, prices, dates etc. but you would also skim read descriptions of the destinations.

h. An armchair travel book about a country you have enjoyed visiting.
Extensive reading – you are likely to read this for pleasure as you would a novel.

i. An on-line flight timetable.
Scan reading – you will try and locate the dates and times that suit you best.

Task 4 - Feedback

a) 2
b) 8
c) 5
d) 1
e) 4
f) 3
g) 9
h) 7
i) 6