

What kind of tasks should be used with different reading texts, and what reading skills will they practise? This lesson will give you ideas on how to create more focused reading tasks. Before you complete this task, it may be helpful to have looked at *Reading 1: Knowing about strategies and sub-skills*.

Task 1 – What went wrong?

Chris gave his students a reading text about a lifesaver who rescued a young girl from the sea. He made sure students had a task to go with the text. After students finished reading, he asked them to do a role play – one person playing the lifesaver, the other person playing a journalist who interviews the lifesaver. When he asked students to do the role play, they told him they didn't feel confident and couldn't speak.



What went wrong?

Choose which of the following reasons is most likely to have made the students feel unconfident about doing the role play.

- a. The students are shy about speaking.
- b. Chris' instructions for the role play were unclear.
- c. The students hadn't understood the text well enough to do the role play.
- d. Chris didn't do a long enough lead in to the text.
- e. The students can't imagine what it's like to be a lifesaver

Check your answers in the key below 



Task 1 Feedback

All the answers are possible, but c is the most likely. Chris may have given his students a reading task, but it might not have checked the information in the text in enough detail and students do not feel they have understood the text well enough to do the role play.

ESOL Teaching Skills Taskbook

Reading 2: Setting tasks for reading texts: Unit 3 d)

Task 2 – Some opinions about reading



Read the following statements about reading and decide if you think these statements are True or False by writing 'T' or 'F' in the right hand column below.

Statements about reading	True or False?
a. It's a good idea to get students to underline new vocabulary in the text the very first time they read it.	
b. It is not possible to create an intensive reading task for a bus timetable.	
c. True / False questions can only be used for detailed reading tasks.	
d. You should set reading tasks before students begin reading.	
e. It's not a good idea to set time limits for reading because it makes students panic.	
f. The first time students read a text, it's better that they don't use a dictionary.	
g. Sometimes it's a good idea to get students reading and not bother about a task.	
h. Lead in activities are mostly a waste of time.	
i. It helps students to get the gist understanding of a text before reading for detail.	
j. Students should be able to understand a writer's opinion about a topic the very first time they read.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 3 – Matching tasks to texts



Numbers 1 to 3 show three different kinds of reading text. Letters a to i are descriptions of reading tasks. Match them together with the appropriate text, and then put them in the correct order (which task would you do first?, second?, etc).

Texts	Tasks
1. a job advertisement.	
2. a letter to the editor of a newspaper.	
3. an encyclopedia entry.	

Reading tasks

- a. scanning for numbers like hours, wage etc.
- b. very detailed reading to understand the writer's point of view
- c. skim reading to locate relevant information
- d. scan to locate the correct heading
- e. detailed reading about the profile of the person they want and job description
- f. skim reading to determine interest in topic under discussion
- g. detailed reading to fully understand all the information related to this topic
- h. skim reading for suitability
- i. detailed reading to understand all points being made

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key skill

When we ask students to read texts it is a good idea to give them a task with the text. Reading tasks should aim to do 2 things: make sure students practise a reading sub-skill and make sure students understand the text. Which skills students practice and how much detail they need to understand will depend on the kind of text students are reading and whether they are reading the text for the first, second or third time.

Task 4 – Evaluating reading tasks



In the box below is a short reading text followed by 3 reading tasks aimed at pre intermediate students. On the next page there are 3 statements (a to c) with two options (I and ii) that ask you to evaluate the reading tasks. Tick the option that you think is correct to complete each statement.

Popular TESOL Course

Our current TESOL Course has proved to be very popular with students from all around the world. We are running two groups this month and there is a very good mix of people from many different countries: China, the Czech Republic, Japan, Italy, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland and Tahiti.

Paola Cavalcante is the first Italian teacher to attend the TESOL Course since it began 8 years ago. She has taught English and French in her home town of Florence for a total of 12 years, but has focused almost exclusively on teaching English for the last 6 years.

She says there is great demand for English teachers in Italy. “Most people want to speak a foreign language for their jobs, for travelling, for study abroad and so on.” The TESOL Course is the first methodology course that Paola has studied overseas. “At home when there was ever anything interesting about methodology I always liked to go – usually in the evening or weekends – in my free time.”

Task 1 (first reading)

What countries are talked about in the text?

Task 2 (second reading)

Which answer is correct? This text is ...

- a) a report b) an article c) a story

Task 3 (third reading)

What does the word “exclusively” mean? (see line 7)

✓ Tick the statement you think is correct.

a. Task 1 is ...

- i. appropriate for a first reading because it is easy for students to do.
- ii. not appropriate for a first reading because scanning the country names does not give a general idea of what the text is about.

b. Task 2 is ...

- i. appropriate for a second reading because it makes students think about the text type.
- ii. not appropriate for a second reading because it does not check understanding of the text in enough detail

c. Task 3 is ...

- i. appropriate for a third reading because by a third reading students should be able to work out the meaning of new words from the context.
- ii. not appropriate for a third reading because it is too hard

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

→ Thinking about your teaching ...

Many course books do not provide appropriate reading tasks. They either require students to understand too much detail too soon, or they do not check understanding of texts in enough detail. Look at the course book or teaching materials you are currently using. Look at the reading texts and evaluate the tasks.

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 205 to 212 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (OUP 2000), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design.

On pages 184 to 191 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design, including a section on extensive reading.

On pages 283 to 302 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design, including a section on how to sequence a reading lesson.

See also section 1 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 a) Reading 1: Knowing about strategies and sub-skills (recommended as a precursor to this lesson)**

Answer Key**Task 2 feedback**

- a. **False** – this means that students focus immediately on what they don't know, rather than focusing on what they do know.
- b. **False** – it is only worth scanning a bus timetable for specific information. It is not necessary to read the whole timetable in detail.
- c. **False** – True/ False questions could be used to check gist understanding of the text. It depends how you word the question.
- d. **True** – this provides students with a reason to read.
- e. **False** – sometimes it is necessary to set time limits for reading to make sure students practise skim or scan reading skills.
- f. **True** – students need practice in reading as fluently as possible and stopping to use a dictionary every time they don't understand a word inhibits this process.
- g. **False** – students need a reason for reading, particularly in the classroom where their motivation to read some texts may not be very high.
- h. **False** – lead in activities can help raise a student's interest in reading a text and they can often provide useful background information on the content of a text.
- i. **True** - a global understanding of the text will allow students to process the details more easily on the second reading.
- j. **False** – to understand a writer's opinion more often than not requires a very detailed understanding of a text. This is too difficult to pick up in a first reading.

Task 3 feedback

- 1) h, a and e
- 2) f, l and b
- 3) d, c and g

Task 4 feedback

- a) **Task 1 is ...ii.** ... not appropriate for a first reading because scanning the country names does not give a general idea of what the text is about.
Task 1 should aim to provide a gist understanding of the text as a whole.
- b) **Task 2 is ...ii.** ... not appropriate for a second reading because it does not check understanding of the text in enough detail
Task 2 should aim to give students a more thorough understanding of the information in the text.
- c) **Task 3 is ...i.** ... appropriate for a third reading because by a third reading students should be able to work out the meaning of new words from the context.
But note: for task 3 to work, tasks 1 and 2 will need to be changed so they check information in the text more thoroughly.