

READING SKILLS

This section deals with reading skills. You will encounter lessons and exercises on practical reading, general reading, prose, poetry, and drama. Each lesson and exercise is designed to improve your reading skills, increase your vocabulary, and deepen your understanding of the author's meaning.

PRACTICAL READING

What is practical reading? Practical reading is the reading you use in the activities of your everyday life. It may include reading a newspaper, an advertisement, a legal document, a recipe, a street sign, or directions for constructing something. There are numerous instances where reading is necessary in order to function well in our day-to-day lives.

Unlike other types of reading such as prose, poetry, or drama, practical reading is necessary and not done for sheer enjoyment. It may involve thousands of words every day. Styles of practical reading range from simple road signs to complex legal documents. A carpenter must be able to read plans and do measuring in order to build something. Someone taking out health insurance must be able to read the benefits listed in the policy. The following lessons are designed to help you improve your practical reading.

LESSON 1

Word Usage

Development of skills in the use of words can be a tremendous help in your reading comprehension. There are several techniques for recognizing a word and determining its meaning.

One common method is the use of phonics. By knowing the sounds of the different consonants and vowels, you can “sound out” a word to identify it. Many words can be analyzed this way, although there are some words which are too difficult to identify phonetically.

You can also analyze the structure of a word. For example, to read a compound word (a word made up of two or more smaller words), you can look individually at the smaller words and then combine sounds.

Some words may consist of a root word and an affix (letters added to the front or back of a word). Determining the root word and knowing the meaning of the affix can help you find the meaning of the word.

EXAMPLE: To understand the word *rewire*, we separate it into its root word (*wire*) and its affix (*re*). *Re* means again or anew, so *rewire* means to wire again.

Another method for reading a word is to study the context it is in. By looking at the surrounding words, you can determine which would be the most logical word to complete the thought of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: Suppose a reader did not know the word *softly*. By using context clues in the following sentence, the reader might be able to identify the word: *She walked very softly so as not to frighten the deer*

Context clues are also helpful in determining the meaning of a word.

EXAMPLE: What is the meaning of the word *prod* in the following sentence?
He prodded the logs with the rod to get the fire started.

Context clues should help you determine that *prod* means to stir, poke, or push

Finally, one of the best tools for identifying words is the dictionary. This will help you determine the pronunciation as well as the meaning.

EXERCISE 1

Circle the best possible answer for each of the following questions.

1. If a prefix is one type of affix, in what part of a word is it found?
 - a. in the front
 - b. in the middle
 - c. in the back
 - d. after the first letter

2. What is the root word in the word *international*?
 - a. inter
 - b. tion
 - c. nation
 - d. ter

Questions 3-5 refer to the following passage.

Railroads in Japan

One of the principal means of transportation for the people of Japan is by railroad. The rails traverse the main islands of Japan and connect all the major cities. Millions of Japanese people ride the trains to and from work each day.

3. Find a word from the passage that has an affix at the beginning and end of it
 - a. railroad
 - b. connect
 - c. trains
 - d. transportation

4. Find a compound word in the passage above.
 - a. major
 - b. railroad
 - c. cities
 - d. people

5. If a person determine after reading the passage that *traverse* means to go across, then that person is using
 - a. context clues
 - b. phonics
 - c. structural analysis
 - d. none of the above

LESSON 2

Newspaper

The newspaper is usually a daily or weekly publication containing items of general interest. Good reading skills can be developed from reading newspapers. One seldom has time to read the whole newspaper; therefore, it is important to know how to locate the items that are of interest to you.

Newspapers are divided into sections which are lettered. Each lettered section contains specific information. Section A, for example, usually contains the front page, major news, and the editorials. Other major sections are sports, classified, society, and entertainment.

Most newspapers have an index. It lists subjects or articles and gives the section letters and page numbers where they can be found. The index is usually located somewhere on the front page, making it easier to locate what you can want to read without skimming the whole newspaper page by page.

The front page usually contains the most exciting news. This news is usually called front page, or major news. The headline for the most important news story appears in large bold print. The titles for the remaining stories appear in smaller bold print. You can glance at the index and the headlines to decide if the paper contains articles that you would like to read.

Two of the most widely read sections of the newspaper are the editorial section and the classified, or want ads. Editorials are articles which state the opinions of the publishers, the editors, or the readers of the newspaper. Editorials must be read with the understanding that they are personal viewpoints and are not always based on facts. It is up to the readers to decide if they wish to agree or disagree with an editorial. In the classified section, people may locate houses, cars, tools, other merchandise, and jobs. This is the buy, sell, and rent section. It is divided into numbered subsections and has its own index. In this way, the readers may quickly find the item or job needed.

EXERCISE 2

Read the following sample index. Then circle the best possible answer to each question.

Index

Classified.....E6-18	Letter Box.....A5
Comics.....C8	News Box.....A3
Deaths.....B3	People in News.....B4
Editorials.....A4	Sports.....D1-10
Entertainment.....E1-5	TV Programs.....E4
Good Health.....C3	Weather.....A2
Horoscope.....E3	

1. Newspapers are usually
 - a. published yearly
 - b. published twice a year
 - c. published daily or weekly
 - d. none of the above

2. Newspapers have a major index which is usually located in the
 - a. last page
 - b. last section
 - c. second section
 - d. first section

3. Looking at the sample index, you would find sports on page(s)
 - a. D12, D13
 - b. D9, D10
 - c. B3
 - d. A2

4. If you were looking for a job, to which of the following sections would you go?
 - a. editorial page
 - b. sports section
 - c. classified
 - d. none of the above

5. The editorial page has articles of fact on
 - a. sports
 - b. weather
 - c. fashion
 - d. none of the above

6. In the sample index, the TV Programs and Horoscope are on pages which are included in the overall listing
 - a. comics
 - b. entertainment
 - c. classified
 - d. none of the above

General Reading

What is general reading? General reading is similar to practical reading in that you encounter it in your daily living. However, it is based more on interest than on necessity. This type of reading can keep you up-to-date in your work or be strictly for informational purposes.

Perhaps you are taking a course or have an interest in mechanics. The materials you read would fall under general reading. Any magazine articles or newspaper editorials you read would fall under this category. General reading would also include anything you read involving a hobby or a do-it-yourself project. In short, general reading is everyday reading you do purely for enjoyment or to satisfy some interest and not necessarily because you have to do it.

LESSON 1

The Public Library

Most cities and towns have a public library. Larger cities have a main library as well as branch libraries. Public libraries are supported by tax dollars. Private citizens are encouraged to give donations of money and books as a service to the community.

In the public library, you will find not only books available to be checked out, but also magazines, films, art works, and records. The size of the city usually determines the extent of the materials assembled in the local library. Many libraries have reading rooms, children's departments, and reference sections.

There are two systems that libraries use for arranging their materials. One is the Dewey Decimal System. The library collection is broken into ten major categories, and each category is subdivided into smaller units. The categories and subcategories are given numbers. The other system is the Library of Congress classification. The library collection is categorized using numbers and letters according to subject areas. Always check with the librarian when you enter a library for the first time to find out which system is used in the library. The librarian can assist you in locating books and will demonstrate how to use the card catalogue.

Each material in the library has three separate cards in the card catalogue. These are the author card, the title card, and the subject card. Each card gives information about the material. Its location in the library is shown by a call number listed in the upper left-hand corner. The system for making call numbers varies with each library, but usually it contains the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress number and the author's name in some code.

EXERCISE 1

Circle the best possible answer to each of the following question

1. A public library is supported by
 - a. taxes
 - b. donations
 - c. both of the above
 - d. none of the above

2. How many recognized systems are there that libraries may use to arrange the library materials?
 - a. four
 - b. two
 - c. twenty
 - d. eight

3. The person in charge of the library is called a
 - a. principal
 - b. president
 - c. teacher
 - d. librarian

4. If you know the title of a book, you may find its location in the library by looking at the
 - a. subject card file
 - b. author card file
 - c. title card file
 - d. none of the above

5. The Library of Congress categorizes books by
 - a. roman numerals
 - b. roman numerals and letters
 - c. numbers and letters
 - d. numbers

6. A book in the library is catalogued by
 - a. title
 - b. author
 - c. subject matter
 - d. all of the above

LESSON 2

Editorials

Editorials are articles that express opinions based on facts. The editorial page of a newspaper gives opinions of the editors or owners of the paper. In reading editorials, it is important to realize that they are usually written for some specific purpose other than to report the facts of a given event or situation. Some editorials attempt to arouse action for a certain cause. The reader may or may not agree with this cause. Other editorials express appreciation for good causes or deeds. Still other editorials merely discuss issues without reaching any definite conclusions.

Editorials can be beneficial to the public when they provide comprehensive information about a certain subject which may reveal a need for corrective action. Often individual citizens do not have the time or the resources to investigate an issue and are therefore dependent upon editorials to help make decisions.

Newspapers may have their local editorial page supplemented by editorials from larger papers written by syndicated writers. Syndicated writers usually have agencies which represent them and sell their articles throughout the country.

EXERCISE 2

Circle the best possible answer to the following questions

1. Many editorials are written for the purpose of
 - a. reporting facts
 - b. presenting opinions based on fiction
 - c. arousing action for a cause
 - d. none of the above

2. In reading an editorial, readers should
 - a. always agree with the opinions that are expressed
 - b. use their own judgment and form their own opinions
 - c. read with the express purpose of disagreeing with the opinions that are stated
 - d. all of the above

3. In an editorial written to state the reasons why a new hospital should be built in a city, the author is mainly attempting to
 - a. discuss an issue with no conclusion
 - b. express praise for a certain need
 - c. arouse action against a cause
 - d. arouse action for a certain cause

4. Which of the following editorial topics would have the expression of appreciation for a good deed as its main purpose?
 - a. opinions against a proposed tax bill
 - b. reasons why a street sign is needed on a certain corner
 - c. statements about a mail carrier's quick action upon seeing a robbery
 - d. views for and against proposed power plant

5. Syndicated writers
 - a. have agencies which represent them
 - b. write articles which appear in many newspapers
 - c. write articles that appear in small and large newspapers
 - d. all of the above

6. Editorials can be beneficial to citizens who
 - a. have neither the time nor ability to investigate every issue
 - b. are against tax bills
 - c. require corrective action
 - d. want only facts

PROSE

What is prose? Prose is that form of literature considered to be similar to everyday speech. It has no regular rhyme or rhythm. Prose may be broken up into two major categories, nonliterary and literary. In this section, you will be studying only literary prose.

Literary prose is divided into two types, nonfiction and fiction. Nonfictional works are those whose main purpose is to convey information. This type of prose includes autobiographies, biographies, essays, newspapers, and other written material that is informative. Non fiction can be anything from the author's personal opinions to textbooks.

Works of fiction deal with life as seen through the imagination of the author. Fiction may appear to you to be true, but all the characters are manipulated by the author. This type of writing can be very appealing, since the reader may identify with the characters and share in their imaginary lives. Fictional characters quite often mirror parts of ourselves and give us a greater understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

What is plot? The plan of events which take place in any type of prose is called the plot of the story. Plot is usually associated with fictional prose.

What part do the characters play? The characters of a story are the people involved in the action. Through the actions and words of the characters, the author carries out the plot of the book.

What is meant by setting? The setting in prose is the place and time in which the characters live and move. Knowing the setting helps the reader understand the plot and the characters.

LESSON 1

Characterization

There are many varieties of characters. Some characters are generalized. You must interpret their personalities from what is said about them either by the author or by another character in the story.

A second type is the flat character. This is a person with little individuality who has so many traits of a particular class that he or she becomes a typical example of that class.

The third type is the individualist, or round, character. This variety of character is more complex and interesting. The character appears much like an actual person.

All these types of characters may appear in the same work of fiction. The author uses the different types of characters as a way to convey her or his meanings to the reader. It is likely that the main character or characters of a work will be round characters, and the minor characters will most likely be generalized or flat characters.

EXERCISE 1

Read the following selection. Then circle the best possible answer in each question.

In the morning of life came the good fairy with her basket, and said: "Here are gifts. Take one, leave the others. And be wary, choose wisely; Oh, choose wisely! for only one of them is valuable." The gifts were five: Fame, Love, Riches, Pleasure, Death. The youth said, eagerly: "There is no need to consider"; and he chose Pleasure. He went out into the world and sought out the pleasures that youth delights in. But each in its turn was short-lived and disappointing, vain and empty; and each, departing, mocked him. In the end he said: "These years I have wasted. If I could but choose again, I would choose wisely."

Mark Twain, "The Five Boons of Life"

1. This selection suggests that the youth is which of the following?
 - a. a generalized character
 - b. a flat character
 - c. a round character
 - d. none of the above

2. The last two sentences indicate that the youth
 - a. has grown older and realized his life was wasted
 - b. has grown senile
 - c. has grown old and is dying
 - d. is still a young man looking for an easy life

3. The fairy in this selection represents which of the following?
 - a. an ugly, stupid woman
 - b. an old hag trying to trap the youth
 - c. a wise fairy who gives fair warnings
 - d. a wise fairy who is trying to trap the youth

4. To what does the beginning phrase "In the morning of life" refer?
 - a. the beginning of the youth's life
 - b. the beginning of a new day
 - c. the middle of the day
 - d. the day the youth awoke

LESSON 2

Setting

Setting is the place and time in which the action occurs. Words, phrases, and sometimes whole paragraphs are inserted by the author to explain the setting to the reader. Often, the characters explain the setting in their dialogue.

Setting is extremely important in prose, because the author must have background scenery for the characters. Quite often, certain actions can occur only in particular places. Proper setting can, therefore, lead realism to a scene. Understanding of setting can also help the reader better understand the characters and their actions.

In fictional prose, the author usually explains setting in detail in descriptive passages. This is particularly true in novels, where the length of a work is not limited. However, in short stories, very little setting is given. The readers must use their imagination to complete the background for the action.

Be very careful in your reading and look for the words, phrases, and sentences that are there to help you visualize the setting.

EXERCISE 2

Read the following selection. Then circle the best possible answer to each question.

He awoke chilled and sick. There was no sun. The gray of earth and sky had become deeper, more profound. A raw wind was blowing, and the first flurries of snow were whitening the hilltops. The air about him thickened and grew white while he made a fire and boiled more water. It was wet snow, half rain, and the flakes were large and soggy. At first they melted as soon as they came in contact with the earth, but ever more fell, covering the ground, putting out the fire, spoiling his supply of moss fuel.

From *Jack London's Tales of Adventure*, by
Jack London (New York: Doubleday, 1956).
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1. The setting of this selection appears to be a
 - a. crowded city
 - b. desert island
 - c. northern wilderness
 - d. tropical rain forest

2. The character in this selection is without
 - a. clothes
 - b. water
 - c. ammunition
 - d. shelter

3. If the setting had been the desert, which of the following actions would probably *not* have occurred?
 - a. the air thickened and grew white
 - b. water was boiled
 - c. a fire was made
 - d. none of the above

4. The phrase "the air about him thickened and grew white" means that
 - a. the sun was shining
 - b. a sandstorm was in progress
 - c. a snowstorm was in progress
 - d. the forest was on fire

LESSON 3

Tone

Tone is the feeling and attitudes that an author injects in the writing. The author uses tone to influence the reader's attitude toward the selection. He or she attempts to make the reader identify with the writer's attitudes and emotions about a particular subject. At the same time, the author is trying to express a definite viewpoint to the reader.

There are many kinds of tone: anger, frustration, satire, love, irony, amusement, tragedy, optimism, pessimism, and so on. In searching for the tone of a work, pay attention to setting and characterization as well. An author can influence your reaction to a particular character just by the tone in which she or he writes. Similarly the setting of a scene can help to set the tone. Consider a typical English mystery set on a deserted moor in a dark and raging storm. Such a setting enhances the one of fear the author's desires to create.

An author's purpose in writing a selection influences the tone that is used. An author may use satire to point out vices and follies of people's behavior. Satire combines wit with a critical attitude. It may be directed at almost anything—a particular person, human beings in general, a nation, or anything the author feels is not as it should be. Thus satire is sometimes hard to understand, since knowledge of the author's viewpoint and the conditions about which the author's wrote is necessary to grasp the full meaning.

Irony is another tone of writing which may be hard to interpret. Irony reflects the author's true attitudes and feelings, but the writing is done in terms which seem to mean the opposite of what the author feels. You must interpret what the author really means. Irony is often effectively used to criticize something with which the author strongly disagrees.

In both irony and satire that are several devices an author may use to establish the tone. One such device is exaggeration or hyperbole, the deliberate overstatement of an idea or event. At the opposite is understatement, the treating of relatively catastrophic events in a very low key manner. In both cases, the opposite is closer to the author's true feelings.

EXERCISE 3

Read the following selections. Circle the best possible answer for each question.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will serve in a fricassee or a ragout...

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children...

Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal"

1. The overall tone of this selection is
 - a. humorous
 - b. serious
 - c. satirical
 - d. dramatic
2. The author uses which other tone to establish the overall tone?
 - a. tragedy
 - b. irony
 - c. love
 - d. satire

Infinite Goodness is of so communicative a nature that it seems to delight in the conferring of existence upon every degree of perceptive being. As this is a speculation upon which I have often pursued with great pleasure to myself, I shall enlarge farther upon it, by considering that part of the scale of beings which comes within our knowledge.

Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*

3. The mood of the above selection is one of
 - a. mystery and fantasy
 - b. quiet bemusement
 - c. deep anger
 - d. concerned seriousness

"It's the table, the table!" cried Julia.

"Nonsense," said my wife. "Who ever heard of a ticking table? It's on the floor. Bidly! Julia! Anna! move everything out of the room—table and all. Where are the tackhammers?"

Herman Melville, "The Apple-Tree Table"

4. The tone of this selection is
 - a. surprise
 - b. reflective sympathy
 - c. amused satire
 - d. blissful optimism

