

Success with reading - how to organise a reading programme (Part 2: Extensive reading) Philip Prowse

The aim of an extensive reading programme is simple: to get the learners to read as many books as possible. Any activities we suggest must support this aim and not stand in the way of it.



Try to make time each week for reading in class.

This is not easy if you only have two or three hours a week but a 20 minute session once a week can make all the difference. This is because by doing this you show that reading is important. Start by discussing the benefits of extensive reading with your students and, where relevant, their parents and, ideally, your colleagues and superiors. It is important to get across the idea that time spent reading in class is not time wasted. At the same time you want to encourage students to take books home to read.

What is your role while the students read in class?

Read a reader yourself – by doing this you give value to the books by showing that you also like them. And by reading them you will be able to talk to the students about them. Take time to talk to students individually about their reading. If students ask you and want to read aloud, listen to them individually.

How do you choose the books for your students to read?

Ideally you don't! Let the students choose what to read themselves. If you are lucky and your school buys the books, involve the students by letting them choose from the catalogue or by going to the bookshop. If you already have class or school libraries to work with make sure that the students choose what they read. If there is no class library then consider creating one! You can do this by getting each student to buy one (different) book and after reading to exchange them.

Train your students to choose the books they like by getting them to identify level and genre from the cover. Practise looking at the title, front cover picture and blurb to work out what kind of book it is.

What about levels?

Don't worry too much. Every class is mixed ability and any class library will probably have at least three levels. As important as level is content and genre. Someone who likes science fiction will happily read a science fiction book at a level above or below their ability rather than struggle through a (hated) romance at the right level.

How to organise a class library?

Don't! Let the students do it. Give two students responsibility for looking after the books, lending them and getting them back. If you are lucky to have a classroom of your own then you can display the books on shelves. But most probably the class library will be a cardboard box or plastic bag of books that you bring to the class. Spread the books out carefully, with their covers up, on a table so that the students can see clearly what to choose from.

Get students to recommend books to each other.

A good way of doing this is to have a card inside each reader for students to put one-word comments on. Don't be afraid to give students prizes for the one who has read the most books in a certain period. Sweets, a free book, or even freedom from doing the homework, all work!

Be positive about reading and show it to be a pleasure.

An idea borrowed from the USA is called DEAR time. This stands for Drop Everything And Read. Students need to have a reader with them in class for this to work. Quite simply when the lesson is dragging or it's a hot Friday afternoon just clap your hands and say 'DEAR time'. Everyone, including you, takes out their reader and reads for a few minutes. Then you can all return refreshed to the lesson topic.

What not to do

And now a few don'ts! These are activities which I know don't encourage students to read – I know it because I've done them myself!

Don't let students read with a dictionary.

Dictionaries are fine for intensive reading and teaching dictionary use is a valuable part of learning to become a better learner. But when students are reading on their own for pleasure dictionaries get in the way. *Cambridge English Readers* are written within a carefully controlled vocabulary and all new words

are contextualised and repeated. By letting students stop to look up the meaning of every 'new' word we are preventing them from using the valuable skill of guessing. It's better to approximate the meaning of a word and then have that guess verified on the word's next occurrence.

Don't test students.

Notice that *Cambridge English Readers* don't have questions at the back. The aim is for them to be read as real books. The *Check your reading* activities on the worksheet can be done by students working on their own who want to, but it is a mistake to require it. That gets in the way of reading. We want our learners to turn the page and read the next chapter. Similarly, testing students on books they have read is counter-productive. It is not likely to make them want to read another. Would you ever go to a bookshop if you had to complete a test on the book you had just read before you could buy another?

Don't ask students to write summaries.

Similarly, writing summaries or book reviews gets in the way of reading. A simple recommendation is a good idea but the time spent painstakingly summarising a plot is better spent on reading another book!

Don't ask students to read aloud around the class.

As noted above some students may wish to read individually to the teacher. But reading around the class is something most students hate; no-one listens to the reader; everyone is preparing the next bit they have to read and the poor students who are reading suffer agonies. On the other hand, for you the teacher to read to the students can only be good news!