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Graded Readers

The 'Why' and 'How' of Using Graded Readers

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**Guide to the 'Why' and 'How' of
Using Graded Readers**

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Satoko's Reading Problem

“Why is it that after 6 or even 10 years of study in school, most Japanese learners of English still cannot read well?”

To illustrate the above problem, here is a real-life story. This is a conversation between a teacher and Satoko, a university student, at the school's graduation party. Can you recognize something in this story?

- Teacher:* Congratulations, Satoko.
- Satoko:* Thank you very much.
- Teacher:* You majored in literature, I think. Is that right?
- Satoko:* Yes, American Literature.
- Teacher:* That's great. Which author did you enjoy the most?
- Satoko:* Umm, well we concentrated on Steinbeck.
- Teacher:* I see. And which of his books did you read?
- Satoko:* Well, I only read one book.....
- Teacher:* Oh, really? Just one book?
- Satoko:* There were so many difficult words. I had to spend hours looking them up in the dictionary, and my book is covered in translations. But I still couldn't understand it well.
- Teacher:* Wow, that sounds like a lot of work.
- Satoko:* Actually, I also read it in Japanese in order to understand it. Well, I had to, or else I couldn't graduate.
- Teacher:* How long did it take to read the English version?
- Satoko:* Well, we started in my junior year, and we translated about 4 or 5 pages a week so we could understand it in detail. I guess it took about two years, but even then we didn't finish it. We spent the first 6 months just on the first chapter.
- Teacher:* One book in two years! I see. Can you understand it better now after all that work translating it?
- Satoko:* No, I still can't say I understand it very well.
- Teacher:* So, now that you've graduated and you have a bit more free time, are you going to read more American Literature in English?
- Satoko:* No way! It was far too difficult. I'm never going to pick up another English book in my life. I'll watch the movie instead!

When children learn to read in their mother tongue, they are gently taken in stages from reading very simple books to reading more difficult material later. This is also necessary for people learning second languages such as English. It seems that Satoko was not given a chance to develop her reading ability in this way. Her reading problems probably result from some, or all, of the following factors:

1. She was not reading enough of the right kind of texts

2. She read texts with too many difficult words rather than at her own reading ability level
3. She was not given training in how to read
4. She did not enjoy her reading, and her confidence as a reader in English was low
5. She did not develop into a fluent and smooth reader in English
6. She did not understand the importance of the strategies and skills of reading
7. She spent too much time learning inappropriate vocabulary and grammar
8. She thought that the only real way to check comprehension is to translate
9. She believed that reading difficult texts would help her reading ability
10. She had no goals to aim for when developing her reading ability

Satoko's story is not a rare one in Japan. There are countless thousands of people like Satoko who once had an earnest desire to learn to read in English. However, through a series of reading failures, she has lost that enthusiasm. Let us look more closely at Satoko's problems.

In Extensive Reading, all the learners are reading different material at their own ability level, which builds reading fluency and reading confidence because the learners select what they want to read.

The first problem is the great mismatch between Satoko's reading ability and what she was expected to do in her reading classes. Despite Satoko's hard work, it still took her two years of translation reading just to read one native-speaker level book. The result: she totally lost her desire to read American Literature and her confidence in reading. She was turned off reading in English for life. So, the most important cause of Satoko's failure was that she was reading something far too difficult, something way beyond her ability level. For Satoko, reading in English was a battle; a battle that she lost.

Secondly, Satoko did not seem to see the value of reading easy texts to build up her fluency in reading. Satoko saw her reading as a translation task, rather than as a way to develop the skill of reading. Thirdly, Satoko did not read a wide variety of texts to get used to different writing styles in English. Lastly, Satoko did not seem to develop a range of strategies for dealing with unfamiliar aspects of a text, such as unknown vocabulary. (She used only one technique - checking her dictionary). No doubt, if we asked Satoko more questions we would discover more about her reading, and her attitudes to reading in English.

Satoko's problems were not necessarily caused by poor teaching. All too often, reading teachers do not have full control over what happens in their classes. For example, their curriculum requires them to cover so much language that there is very little time to review work from previous classes, or to develop the skills of reading.

The cardinal rule of language learning is this:
 "The most important language to work with is the language learned yesterday."

Extensive Reading can provide wonderful opportunities for the learners to revise what they have done in class by reading lots of simple text at their own reading ability level. A huge advantage of having an Extensive Reading program is that it does not take up much class-time, because the reading practice is done *out of class*.

The aim of this booklet

The aim of this book is to introduce the idea of Extensive Reading by using Graded Readers, and to show how it should fit into an overall reading program. This booklet will:

- explain why Extensive Reading is so important and necessary for all language learners
- show how and why Extensive Reading works
- show teachers how to start an Extensive Reading Program
- suggest a balanced reading approach for Japanese learners that will allow them to:
 - a) read confidently and fluently
 - b) read at their own ability level
 - c) learn the importance of reading strategies and skills, such as how to guess unknown words successfully; recognizing text structure; how to use a dictionary properly, and so on.

A typical reading text given to Japanese learners

Before we look closely at Extensive Reading, it is important to understand how reading in English is often taught here in Japan. Let us look at a typical reading task that many Japanese learners meet. Not all reading texts are like this, but this is typical of many found in English textbooks. As you read this, see if you can find any similarities with texts you use.

The Life of Helen Keller

Pre-reading questions

What do you know about Helen Keller?
Why was she famous?
When did she live?

Now read the text.

Helen Keller was a renowned American authoress who wrote widely on educational and political matters. However, she is most well-known for being blind and deaf. She was born on June 27th, 1880, but when she was about a year old she came down with a terrible illness, which led to her becoming blind and deaf. When she spoke she could only utter noises like a bird and in her frustration she even struck her parents. Her parents could not cope with her handicap and did not know how to raise her. They eventually found her a teacher called Annie Sullivan. Annie Sullivanetc. etc....

Vocabulary

Frustration (欲求不満)	Eventually (結局)	Handicap(障害)	Widely (広く)
Authoress (女流作家)	Renowned (高名な)	Cope with (対処する)	Illness (病気)

Comprehension questions

- 1) When was Helen born?
- 2) What was her problem?
- 3) Why did she hit her parents?
- 4) What was her teacher's name?

Put these words in order.

- 1) deaf was Helen blind Keller and
- 2) Sullivan teacher's was name her Annie

Translate these sentences in to English.

- 1) ヘレンは、見ることも聞くこともできなかった。
- 2) サリバン先生に助けられて、ヘレンは高名な女流作家になった。

Translate these words into Japanese.

- 1) widely
- 2) come down with
- 3) struck

Some of the features of the Helen Keller text can also be found in textbooks used for preparing for High School and University entrance exams, TOEIC, TOEFL, EIKEN and so on. Usually, these kinds of readings are found in textbooks in which each chapter has a different topic.

Let us look more closely at some features of these kinds of text:

- The material is usually selected by the teacher, not the students
- All the learners read the same material at the same time (usually in class)
- The text is quite short (often these texts are no more than 300 words)
- There is a heavy emphasis on using the text to learn vocabulary and grammar
- There are many difficult words (the aim is to teach them)
- Vocabulary is taught by translation
- There is a pre-reading task (an activity before the reading begins)
- Comprehension is tested
- There are 'post-reading' grammar and vocabulary exercises
- Students rarely meet the new vocabulary again in later chapters

Intensive Reading

It is important to note that the main aim of this type of reading is not to practice *the reading skills*, but to practice and learn the *language* (i.e. grammar and vocabulary) through reading. This type of reading is called **Intensive Reading**, because the learner is intensively involved in looking inside the text at the vocabulary and grammar, and is concentrating on a 'careful reading' of the text.

- Did you find that you were reading word-by-word?
- Did you find some words difficult to read, and others (usually short ones) quite easy?
- When you got to the end of the text had you forgotten the beginning?
- Did you find you were re-reading parts of the text?

This is exactly what beginning readers do with texts like “The Life of Helen Keller”. This is called ‘word-by-word’ reading. In this type of reading, word identification is slow and labored, and comprehension is poor. Too much difficult reading like this can leave learners like Satoko discouraged. Learners need to read things smoothly, so they can understand better.

Satoko's reading problems and an answer for them

We have looked at some of the causes of Satoko's problems, but what can reading teachers do about them? What can she do about them herself?

We have learned that if Satoko read lots of texts like “The Life of Helen Keller” or her very difficult American Literature book, then there would be very few chances to develop her reading speed. This is because there are too many difficult words, which would stop her from developing the fluent and smooth eye movements that are necessary to read quickly and well. Satoko can develop these abilities by developing her **reading skills and strategies** (see page 13) and by reading many **graded reading books** in an Extensive Reading program. We will look at each of these aspects of reading.

What is Extensive Reading?

Extensive Reading, sometimes known as Graded Reading, is only one of many things a learner needs to do when learning to read in a second language.

In Extensive Reading:

- the learner reads **huge amounts of very simple text** so that she can read smoothly, confidently and pleasurably. By reading a lot of text the learner will be practicing the vocabulary and grammar taught in other classes
- most of the reading is done **out-of-class**
- the learner reads **well-within** her current reading ability, so she can build reading speed, reading confidence and fluency
- **each learner reads different books from other learners**
- the learner **chooses the book**, not the teacher
- the focus is on **general comprehension and on developing reading fluency**, and not directly on learning new language
- the learner reads a **wide variety** of things that interest her, such as mystery novels, poems, thrillers, detective stories, factual pieces on interesting topics, and simplified classics of English Literature like *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Death of an Englishman*
- because the learner is reading a lot of text, the learner **revisits the most important vocabulary**

- and grammar time and time again, which will help to deepen her knowledge of it
- usually the reading is **not formally assessed**, such as by language tests, but some level of comprehension must be checked

Is Extensive Reading all that the learner needs?

No, but it should be a major part of any reading program. Just doing Extensive Reading may not be as effective as combining it with Intensive Reading, practicing the reading skills, and learning vocabulary independently. But, if a learner is only reading intensively (short difficult texts emphasizing vocabulary and grammar-building, like the '*Helen Keller*' text), it is unlikely she will develop into a *fluent* and *confident* reader.

Why do Extensive Reading?

There are many reasons why learners should read extensively.

Firstly, if the reading is done *within the learner's current reading ability level*, then the learner will be processing words faster and *building the automatic recognition of words*. This will allow her to read faster. As the learner reads faster, she will begin to see words in groups or 'chunks of language,' which allows her to move from reading 'word-by-word' to 'reading-with-ideas,' thus increasing reading fluency. When learners read faster, they understand more (see below).

Second, research here in Japan with Japanese learners clearly shows that Extensive Reading builds *confidence in reading, and motivation to read more*, because the reading is not difficult.

Third, Extensive Reading helps learners to *form the habit of reading*, which can be especially useful for Japanese learners of English who typically are not exposed to massive amounts of language practice otherwise. Once the learners have the reading habit, they can take this with them all their lives and continue to improve their second language in the absence of teachers and classes.

Fourth, our brains work very well at noticing patterns. We make patterns out of the 'chaos' of life to make it simple to understand. We find patterns in behavior, nature, music and of course, language. It is only from exposure to massive amounts of input (like reading) in a foreign language that the brain can work out these patterns. Extensive Reading *provides opportunities for noticing new language and working out the patterns in text and phrases*. If Intensive Reading and vocabulary practice points out new language to the learner, then this language may be noticed again and again in the Extensive Reading.

Fifth, we all know it takes more than one encounter with a new word to 'learn' it. Research suggests that it takes between 15 to 20 meetings of an average word to 'learn' it, so it is vital to revisit new vocabulary again and again. Extensive Reading provides opportunities to do this

Learners need to be reading at or below their reading ability in order to develop reading fluency and confidence.

There is no 'short cut' to the automatic recognition of words. Learners can practice this by reading Graded Readers.

because the learner is *meeting massive amounts of language and is being repeatedly exposed to meaningful occurrences of words and grammatical structures* that are in the process of being learned.

What does ‘word-by-word’ reading and ‘reading with ideas’ mean?

There is a time in the development of the reading skill that a learner becomes able to automatically process ideas, not just individual words. When learners first begin to read, they are trying to make sense of each letter and work out each word separately, which makes reading slow. In the sentence

The old man took his dog to the park

a beginning learner is reading 9 items, by reading each word. If this is done too slowly, the learner may finish the sentence and have forgotten the beginning few words. She may have to re-read the sentence. You may recall this happening to you when you read “The English Lake District” text above. By re-reading the sentence, the speed at which a word can be recognized will increase. If the learner continues to meet the word regularly then the processing of these words becomes automatic.

However, there is a time in the reading development process that a learner can access words so quickly that she starts to read words in groups or ‘chunks of language.’ For example, with the same sentence a faster reader is reading three groups of 3 words, not 9 individual words, like this

The old man took his dog to the park

Note that each of these word groups is one idea. This is a vital stage to reach because if the learner is reading at the idea level, then comprehension is better. Why? Because the reader is processing ideas, not words, and we all remember someone's message (i.e. ideas) much better than the actual words that were used. So when learners read faster, they understand better and can remember more.

For this reason, it is best not to advise learners to move their finger across the page as they read, because this makes the eye read word-by-word rather than in groups or ideas.

Extensive Reading is done out of class, so it takes very little class time.

How is Extensive Reading done?

Usually, Extensive Reading is done with simplified books called Readers or Graded Readers What are Graded Readers?

What are Graded Readers?

Graded Readers (sometimes called Readers or Basal readers) are books written specifically for language learners to develop their reading ability. They are made easy to read by simplifying the vocabulary and grammar so the learner can easily understand the story. Graded Readers are not children's books (although some are written for teenagers and children), but in general they are books for adult language learners.

Each Graded Reader is written at a specific difficulty level by using vocabulary and grammar

limited to that level. You can see some of the range of levels for the Oxford University Press Graded Readers on the inside back cover of this booklet. For example, some books are written within a vocabulary of the 400 most frequent and useful words in English. This is 400 different words, or word families, not 400 words in length. (A word family is a group of words that share the same basic meaning. For example, the help word family includes *helps, helpless, helplessness, unhelpful, helped, helping* and so on.) Other books are more difficult and cover, say, the 1,000 most useful words, and more difficult grammar. Most Graded Readers have some comprehension questions in the back, and a glossary of words for that particular story. When reading Graded Readers, beginning learners start with the easiest levels, and learn to read them smoothly and with good comprehension. When they are ready, they move up to the next difficulty level. They continue like this until they can read books like Satoko's American Literature book.

What kinds of Graded Readers are available?

There are thousands of Graded Readers available for language learners. Oxford University Press offers hundreds of Graded Readers here in Japan. There are thrillers, detective stories, mysteries, and simplified classics of English literature, as well as factual information. For more details see the Oxford University Press catalogue, or the inside of the back cover of this booklet.

There are hundreds of Graded Readers available for language learners.

Why use Graded Readers rather than more difficult texts, like those native speakers read?

One of the main keys to developing the reading skill is to learn to read faster, so the learner can get to the "reading-with-ideas" level of reading. If the learner reads too slowly (because the text is difficult), she probably will not be able to move her eye smoothly across the page, and won't learn to group words together.

But shouldn't they be reading real 'authentic' texts?

It is important to note that the type of reading material used depends on the purpose of the reading. If the purpose is to improve fluency, confidence and so on, this will not be easily achieved with texts that are too difficult. Therefore, 'authentic' texts cannot be useful for fluency practice until the learner can read them fluently. However, these texts may be useful for Intensive Reading (especially for more proficient learners who are able to take advantage of them), but will not suit all learners.

Do I have to carefully choose which vocabulary and grammar to teach?

Yes, extremely carefully. A major reason that learners forget words and language patterns is that they don't meet them again soon after learning them (usually because they do not appear again later in the textbook). Language knowledge is very fragile and soon disappears from memory. So it is vital that the learner meets new language again, or the effort will be wasted. As we have seen, an average word needs to be met very often before the learner can say she 'knows' it. This does not mean she can use it

Research shows that the average word must be met 15 to 20 times before it is 'learned'.

comfortably in her speech or writing, however, as she would still have only a basic sight / meaning relationship. And for grammatical structures the number of required meetings is probably much, much higher. Therefore, the cardinal rule of language learning is this: “*The most important language to work with is the language learned yesterday.*” (In this regard, an independent study has shown that the careful attention which needs to be paid to the recycling of vocabulary has been achieved in the *Oxford Bookworms Library* series.)

As the learner is reading so much language with Extensive Reading, there are good chances she will learn a lot of new language. However, if a learner reads many short texts on different subjects, like the ‘*Helen Keller*’ text, there are very few chances to meet the new language again fairly soon, to reinforce the memory of it.

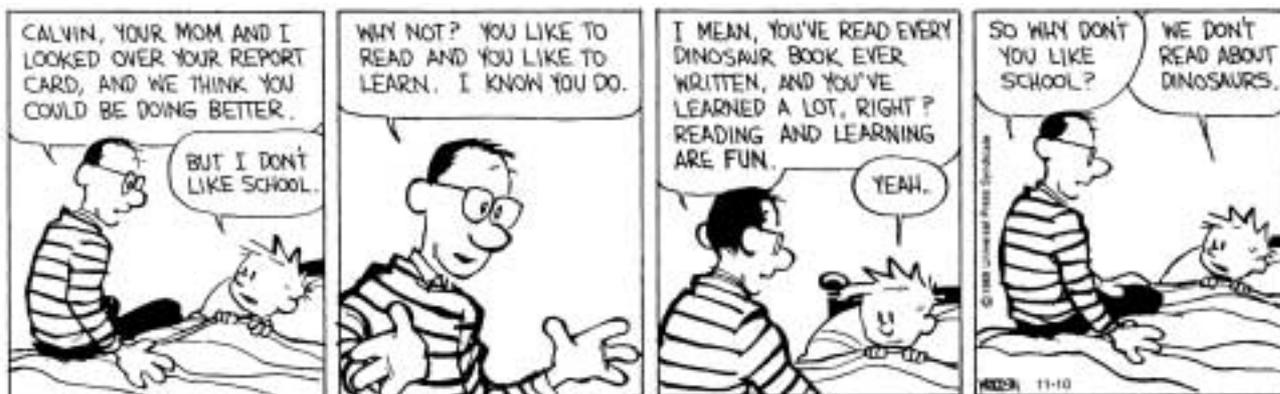
This means the teacher should only be introducing new language which the learner will meet again soon. If a learner is struggling with the 1,000 most common words (and practicing them with Extensive Reading), and the teacher introduces a word at the 5,000 - word level, then there is a very high chance the word will be forgotten because the learner will not revisit it soon. It is simply too far from what she already knows. Therefore, in class it is extremely important that the learners are introduced only to words and language that they will meet again soon.

How much reading should be done?

Teaching does not cause learning. Teachers can only create the environment to develop independent learners.

Research has shown that a learner should ideally be reading about *a book a week at her level of difficulty*. This will provide the learner with enough repetitions of new language so they are not lost from memory. (Of course, reading more is more beneficial for language development.) Reading less than this means the learner will not be revisiting language patterns and vocabulary frequently enough to maintain the new language in memory.

This amount of reading should take about 90-120 minutes per week, or about 15 minutes per day. Beginning level Graded Readers have a lot of picture support and larger print, whereas more difficult books have more words per page and fewer pictures, so less time will be needed for beginning level books.



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Where and when should the reading be done?

The Extensive Reading should be done out of class, for example at home, or on the bus on the way to school, or it can be done as part of a normal class if time permits. In recent years there has been a huge increase in the number of schools and colleges that offer special Extensive Reading classes. The Intensive Reading exercises (learning new language and very carefully checking comprehension) and the teaching of reading skills should be taught in class.

What is the ideal difficulty level for Extensive Reading?

Since the aim is to build automatic recognition of words, and to get the learner to the reading-with-ideas level, she needs to be reading *at or below* her current reading ability. Learners can only build automatic recognition of words if the text is easy for them.

Here are some good 'rules of thumb' for students to find their reading level:

- There should be no more than 2 or 3 unknown words per page
- The learner is reading 8-10 lines or more per minute (80-100 words per minute or better)
- The learner understands almost all of what she is reading with few pauses

As reading speed increases at that level (say to 150 words per minute and with good comprehension) she can then move up to the next level, but the learner must decide.

How does the learner assess her own reading ability level?

There is a simple way to do this. The teacher copies one page from one book at each level (if you have identified 6 levels then you would have 6 pages) and puts them all on one piece of paper. The teacher copies this paper, and gives each student a copy. Each student reads over the paper to find the level where she can read 80-100 words per minute, with about 2 or 3 unknown words per page. Once each student has found her level, it is best to ask that each student starts off with Graded Readers one level below this comfort zone, in order to build confidence with longer texts. It is important to remember that each student should choose what she wants to read, and that not all the students will be at the same difficulty level. Remember, teachers cannot assume that because all the students have studied together, they will all be able to read at the same ability level.

Is it a problem if the reading is a little too difficult?

Probably yes, but it depends on the purpose of the reading. If the purpose is to learn new language, then slow, careful reading while looking at new language is a useful activity, provided what is being learned will be met again soon. Otherwise, it will soon be lost from memory. However, if the purpose of the reading is to improve the learner's reading speed, fluency or confidence, then this can only be done by reading at or below her reading ability.

Research shows that a learner should ideally be reading *a book a week at her level of difficulty.*

If the books are too difficult for the learners, then

- The learners will not be able to read them smoothly enough to develop fluent eye movements and to move up to the 'idea' level of reading

- They will not be able to build the automatic recognition of words
- The learners may lose their reading confidence and motivation
- The learners may become frustrated, tired or bored and give up reading altogether

Some learners want to read more difficult texts than their current ability level in the belief that they will learn more if they meet more new language. This is true, but it is unlikely these learners will easily develop into fluent readers. It is important to stress to these learners that they need fluency practice, too.

How do we assess their Extensive Reading?

Since each learner is reading different books, the teacher does not have enough time to test each student's reading. (However, Oxford University Press has many free support booklets with comprehension tests in them, if teachers wish to use them. Nevertheless, there are many ways to assess this kind of reading. It is important to remember the purpose of the activity is for the learner to do Extensive Reading, to practice her fluency, and thereby develop confidence and enjoyment in reading. Therefore, it is not important that the learner has a 100% comprehension of the text (although comprehension should be fairly high). Here are a few ideas about how to assess a learner's reading.

- they can write a short book report or summary to show they have read the book
- they can show they have read the book in class discussions of their reading
- the teacher can assign a number of pages per term or semester, or grade them on how much they read

You will find many more ideas on the Oxford University Press Japan website.

When can learners start to read Graded Readers?

Before the learners can start to read Graded Readers they should have learned a basic vocabulary of 100 or 200 words, and be able to recognize them in print. These words should be important and useful ones that they will be meeting in their first Graded Readers. They will have to start with the easiest Graded Readers and work up to a good reading speed before moving to more difficult levels.

How about children?

Children need to have mastered a few basic words and be able to recognize them. They will need training in matching sounds to spelling patterns, for example, the *a_e* pattern in *male*, *lace* and *date*, or the *gh* pattern in *enough* and *laugh*. One benefit of this kind of practice is that if they can correctly guess the pronunciation a new word, they will be able to hear it correctly. If they guess the pronunciation incorrectly, they will not notice or recognize it in their listening. Oxford University Press publishes several series of children's books (such as *The Reading Tree* series) which help children start with a vocabulary of only a few words.

How do I know if a book is too difficult for a learner?

Only the learner really knows if the book is too difficult, but there are several ways a teacher can tell. For example, if the student:

- is constantly looking at a dictionary (or in the glossary at the back of the Graded Reader)
- is reading less than 80 words per minute
- is writing translations in the book
- looks bored or disinterested by the book

However, if she is really enjoying a difficult book, it may be best to leave her with it as it meets the aim of helping learners to get the reading habit.

How can I get some money to buy Graded Readers ?

There are several ways to get money. All schools have a budget for buying educational materials, and this is a very useful source of funds. However, if there is no money available from the school, then the learners themselves or their parents are another good source. Some teachers ask their learners to buy a book (about ¥ 600-800 each) and then everyone can share them. At the end of the course, the learners can be asked to donate them to the Extensive Reading library. You should try to obtain a constant source of funds for replacing lost and damaged books, updating and improving the library and so on. Bulk-buying can be cheaper, so shop around.

Once the learners have the reading habit, they can take this with them all their lives and continue to improve their second language in the absence of teachers and classes.

Where can I buy Graded Readers?

You can buy Oxford University Press Graded Readers at most bookshops that sell English books. Contact Oxford University Press for details of where they are sold in your area or visit the OUP Japan website for a list of booksellers in your area. (See outside back cover)

What other support materials for Graded Readers are available from Oxford University Press?

Oxford University Press publishes Teacher Handbooks and Activity Worksheets to support the *Oxford Bookworms Library* series.

What reading skills and strategies do learners need?

Probably one of the most under-taught areas in reading is reading skills and strategies. Research has shown that poor readers have a small number of skills and strategies, while good readers have many strategies and skills. These can include:

- the ability to successfully guess new words from context
- learning how to use a dictionary properly (probably the most under-taught skill of all)
- developing connections between spelling patterns and sounds
- learning to find and recognize the topic of whole texts and within paragraphs learning to find and recognize the main ideas in texts and within paragraphs

The key to a successful reading program is a good balance between Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading, the development of vocabulary, and work on reading skills and strategies.

- developing word-part knowledge (affixes and word roots)
 - knowing how pronouns and synonyms refer to other parts of a text
 - speed reading and timed reading exercises
 - understanding text types and genres
 - understanding patterns within text
 - understanding how to evaluate a text
 - inferring non-literal messages in text
- ...and many, many more.

There will be skills and strategy exercises available for teachers on the Oxford University Press Japan website, so please visit our homepage over the coming months. Also, most Oxford University Press learner's dictionaries have exercises in them to help the learner understand how to use them properly.

How can I put Extensive Reading into my school's curriculum?

There are several ways that teachers from many different types of schools (both public and private) can add Extensive Reading to their curriculum. It is important to remember that *Extensive Reading is mainly an out-of-class activity*, and the only class time it really requires is the management of the library. This means that Extensive Reading can become part of any curriculum. Explaining the need for Extensive Reading and setting up the program should take about 30 minutes of one class, and about 5 minutes each week thereafter. (See the section on “How to set up and manage an Extensive Reading program” that follows.)

Some teachers manage the library in the Homeroom class, while other teachers start a Reading Club in their school. Other teachers ask their students to read books as preparation for their Oral Communication or writing classes, where the students describe their books and tell the stories. Most Extensive Reading teachers make it a part of their normal reading classes.

How to set up and manage an Extensive Reading program

It is important to understand that any Extensive Reading program cannot not sit by itself. The key to a successful reading program is balance. Too much Intensive Reading leads to insufficient work on developing reading fluency. Too much Extensive Reading can lead to a learner not noticing certain language. Too much work only on reading skills will not provide enough practice in reading fluently. Not enough vocabulary support leads to learners who cannot develop their reading fast enough.

The following is only a suggested guide for balancing the different kinds of reading:

When setting up an Extensive Reading program "start small, think big."

In Class:

- 20% Intensive Reading (grammar, vocabulary)
- 10-15% Reading skills and strategies

Out of Class:

- 55-65% Extensive Reading
- 5-10% Independent vocabulary practice

Before an Extensive Reading program is created, it needs to be planned carefully, and prepared well. But be prepared for things not to go so smoothly, especially at first.

Planning an Extensive Reading program

It is vital to make sure that all the people affected by the Extensive Reading program are involved. They need to know what its aims, goals and objectives are, so try to enlist these people in the setting up. As much as possible, try to make group decisions. Insure that all the people involved (including the learners) understand the program. If this is not done there is a danger the Extensive Reading program may become 'Suzuki-sensei's reading thing,' only to disappear when Suzuki-sensei is transferred to another school.

There is often no need to have hard-and-fast rules for all teachers to follow. For example, individual teachers may decide to require different amounts of reading, or different lengths or types of reading reports, or other assessment procedures.

Preparation

A sage piece of advice when setting up an Extensive Reading program is to "Start small, think big." This means you will need to find ways to manage the Graded Reading library so that it can grow and change as the reading program changes over time.

Extensive Reading programs come in all shapes and sizes. Some are restricted to a single class, others to a group of classes, some are school-wide, and others affect a whole school district. So this needs to be taken into consideration when deciding what to do. Try to think ahead to how the Extensive Reading program may end up.

a) Prepare the library

To do this effectively requires some forethought and planning. Some schools and colleges are lucky enough to have their library keep the Graded Readers. This is the best option if available. However, many libraries do not have the resources (space or people) to deal with an additional load of books to check-out, check-in and restock on the shelves.

In the absence of support from the library, you will need to set up your own library management systems. Here is a suggested system than can grow as the Extensive Reading program grows. If several classes will use the Graded Readers, you may wish to consider using a common stock management system.

1. Buy some Graded Readers. At the start, you should try to have at least 1 Graded Reader per learner. You will need a few extras in case some books get lost. This will give you enough books to share between the learners. Later you can try to build the library so there are 2 or 3 books per learner, or more.
2. Number each book. If you have multiple copies of a book it is much easier to identify it and it makes borrowing much easier. Write the number in an easy place to find.
3. Grade the books by difficulty in some way. Oxford University Press Graded Readers clearly show the difficulty levels, but not all publishers use the same system. Publishers often label their series as 'Intermediate' or 'Elementary,' but these things mean very different things between publishers, so you will probably have to make up your own grading system. A good guide is the number of headwords used in each book. For example, you may wish to use the 6 levels for the *Oxford Bookworms Library Series* (see the inside back cover), or adapt it to suit your learners. If you have many poor readers, you may want to add an easier level too. Some teachers also take into account the percentage of pictures-to-text in the book. Try to identify 6 to 8 levels from 'easy' to 'very difficult.'
4. Assign a color for each level (e.g. yellow for the 400 word level, blue for the 700 word level, etc.). If you put colored tape on the spine of each book, the learners can easily identify books at their reading level. The library can be easily managed if you put all the books of one color in individual boxes. There's no need to put them in order by author or book number. Just drop them in the right color box. The best books always filter to the top.

b) Set up a borrowing system

The simplest check-out system has all the learners borrowing and returning books at the same time. Here is an example Book Management Sheet. (Today is April 26th).

Name	April 5	April 12	April 19	April 26	May 3
Irie, Yoshiko	256	875	964	771	
Ogawa, Jun	89	687	332	158	
Kawabata, Hiromi	358	473	865	483	

When a book is borrowed, the learner writes the book number against that week's column. At the beginning of class they return their books in a 'drop box.' In a quiet period during class, the teacher checks off which books have not been returned by looking at the check-out sheet. When the books have been crossed off the sheet, books are only returned to the library. With this method, you can see which books have been borrowed and which have not been returned. Irie-san is late in returning two books. Ogawa-san still has last week's book out, whereas Kawabata-san is not late with any books. If you have a big class with all the students checking books out at the same time, there may be a crowd or long lines that make the process difficult. You may want to put the Book Management Sheet on several different pages, with about 10 names per sheet (each a different color for easy identification). If you spread the different sheets out during the borrowing time, this can 'spread out' the crowding and make the process smoother.

Alternatively, you could instigate an 'honor' system in which you have a Check-Out Sheet like this.

Name	Title	Book number	Date borrowed	Date returned
<i>Irie, Yoshiko</i>	<i>The Elephant Man</i>	589	April 13	April 20
<i>Ogawa, Jun</i>	<i>White Death</i>	478	April 13	
<i>Kawabata, Miki</i>	<i>Karen Silkwood</i>	339	April 20	April 26

However, with this system security is much lower and you can expect to 'lose' a few books. It also takes a long time for learners to find their name if there are several sheets to look through.

It is advisable to ensure that everyone changes books at the same time (say, once a week). If a student forgets to return a book, ask them to keep it until the following week, or you may find it gets out of control. Always ensure that each book is returned through the check-out system, or students will exchange books without you knowing and you'll never know who has which book.

There will be skills and strategy exercises available for teachers on the Oxford University Press Japan website, so please visit www.oupjapan.co.jp over the coming months.

c) Make Reading Summary Sheets

At some time you may need to know which books each learner has read, how many pages were read, and at which difficulty levels, so that you can monitor (or assess) the reading. Below is an example Reading Summary Sheet to provide the teacher with a quick overview. The student should keep this until the end of the course.

Name: *Yoshiko Irie* Student Number : *001223* Starting Reading level: *Pink*

Title	Book number	Book Colour	Date borrowed	Date returned	Number of pages read
<i>The Elephant Man</i>	589	<i>Pink</i>	April 13	April 20	35
<i>White Death</i>	478	<i>Pink</i>	April 20	April 27	58
<i>Love Story</i>	339	<i>Green</i>	April 27		

Total pages _____

d) Make a placement test

You need to make a placement test so that the learner can easily work out what reading level (color) she is.

e) Make a Reading Report outline

In order to check that the reading was done, and for the reading to be extended to writing, many teachers require the learners to write a simple Reading Report for each book that they read. There are many other ways to assess what the learners read, but this is among the most common. This can be done in English or Japanese. The advantages of doing it in English are that it provides writing practice, and the reports can serve as structured support for speaking about the books in class. Students can keep their Reading Reports in a journal, or on individual pieces of paper.

Beginners can complete 'sentence heads' such as

My favorite character was because

The part of the story I liked best was when because

And / or they can write a short summary of the story in Japanese.

Intermediate level learners can write a summary of the story in their own words in English. E.g.

This book was about a young boy who had lost his mother, One day the boy found a magic mushroom in a forest. He showed it to his father who then ...

Advanced learners can write a lengthy summary, as well as their reactions to the story.

You may wish to collect these reports at the end of the course with the students' Reading Summary Sheets (unless you feel the learners will be copying each others'). Advise the learners to take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to write the report. If they have more time, it would be better to use it for reading.

Procedure for each class

Here is a description of what to do in each class:

The first class

1. Explain to the learners the difference between Extensive Reading and Intensive Reading. Explain why they must read extensively, learn the vocabulary that they will meet in their Extensive Reading, and work on developing their reading skills and strategies.
2. Explain the aims, goals and objectives of the reading program to the learners.
3. Show the learners some Graded Readers and point out the main features of them. (e.g. the difficulty levels and colors, the glossary and so on).
4. Assign reading page goals. Some teachers suggest that it is best to set a page goal (e.g. 300 or 500 pages per term / semester). Other teachers recommend that the learner reads a certain number of books during the course. Either way there should be consideration for the level of the learners and the time they will have available to read. Note that easier books tend to have bigger print, more picture support and are shorter, while more difficult texts are denser, with fewer pictures and are longer.
5. Explain the borrowing procedures.
6. Explain the assessment procedures (e.g. a Book Report and class discussions).
7. Advise the learners about the guidelines they should use for selecting a book. Learners select and check-out their own books.
8. Explain the Reading Summary Sheet.

At home

The learners read their books, write their Reading Reports (if required) and fill in their Reading Summary Sheet.

Guidelines for selecting a book

- It should be interesting to the learner
- The learner can read it at or above 80 words per minute
- There are only 2 or 3 unknown words on each page

Subsequent classes

Books are returned and checked-out

Learners can discuss their reading, or use it as a base for their writing classes if time permits

Last class

All books are returned and Reading Summary sheets are taken in.

Evaluation of the Extensive Reading program

As with any class, after running the Extensive Reading program for the first few weeks, there should be a review to see if any changes need to be made. Ensure that any changes are agreed to by all those involved.

This guide is also available in Japanese.

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