

# **DEVELOPING READING EXERCISES**

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes the steps in comprehending a text. The steps lead to developing the exercises that helped the students to understand a text easier. The instruction was designed based on the eight important micro skills. These micro skills in comprehending the reading text were hoped that such kind of exercises can give aid for the students to develop their understanding in the text.

Keywords; reading, micro skills, comprehension, instruction

## **1. Introduction**

Learning English as a foreign language is not easy for the students in Junior High School. They find difficulties in acquiring the language since they have a very low exposure to the target language. Our society gives them very limited chance to express their second language. Besides, their low motivation in learning it also gives contribution to the disadvantage condition.

There are four skills in English language that have to be learnt by the pupil in the Junior High School. Those four should be mastered together to get better way in acquiring English. Also, they give contribution to each other. The one who wants to be able to speak English should have a competence in listening. In the same way, reading and writing also have a close relationship.

It seems that reading skill is the most exposure to English for the students since there are many English written form which can be found everywhere. Nunan mentioned, in

his book, that there are three kinds of writing in the terms of their functions (Nunan, 1991:84):

1. For action: public signs (on roads and stations), product labels and instructions (on food, tools, and toys), recipes, maps, TV and radio guides, bills, etc.
2. For information: newspapers, hobby magazines, nonfictions, textbooks, advertisements, political pamphlets, etc.
3. For entertainment: light magazines, comic strips, fictions, poetry and dramas, games, etc.

Considering the significant value of reading skills above, it is important to choose a good way to make the students achieve the skill easily. We have to arrange a certain steps of instruction or procedure which guide them in learning reading comprehensively. To make the lesson understandable, we can start from an easy reading text. The text that is chosen is *Cinderella* since it is well-known by the students at that age. They sometimes see it on TV program or in the children magazine.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Reading is the interaction between a reader and the text. Simply, the reader looks at the print form, deciphering symbols on the page, deciding what they mean, and how they relate to each other.

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand a message conveyed in a text. The focus of reading process is understanding. It was stated in *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*:

“... Understanding is central to the process of reading and must be the focus of our teaching” (Nuttall, 1982:22).

In addition, Alexander stated that comprehension is a special kind of thinking process. Reader constructs the meaning of a text internally from interacting with what is read (Anderson cited in Alexander, 1982:160).

In comprehending a text, there are two models that can be used: the bottom-up, the top-down, and the interactive.

In the bottom-up model, the learners learn to read through their ability to sound out letters. By decoding skill, they can move to the meaning of the words. They learn the names and the shapes of the letters. Then, they learn consonants correspondence with vowels. This knowledge leads to the recognition of individual words of the text. In simply speaking, the meaning of the whole text is built by understanding the word level, then to the sentence level, and the text level at the last. How the model works is illustrated below (Nunan, 1991:64):

Print→ every letter→ Phonemes and graphemes→ Blending→ Pronunciation→ Meaning discriminated                      matched
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In the second model, the top-down or psycholinguistic approach, the emphasis is on the reader's active participation in the reconstruction of the meaning in the text rather than decoding of form (Nunan, 1991:65). This model concerns at the reader's knowledge base and his/her ability in making prediction by using the base. In processing a text, the reader uses the meaning-drive processes and an assumption about the meaning of a text. He uses the printed material only to confirm and generate new hypotheses (Lipson and Wixson, 1991). The reading model proceeds from whole to part of the text. Here is the illustration of the process (Nunan, 1991:65):

Past experience, language→ Selective aspects→ Meaning→ Sound, pronunciation Intuitions & expectations                      of print                                      if necessary
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The two models have shortcomings. The deficiency of the bottom-up is that it assumes the initiation of higher-level processes (background knowledge) must await lower level decoding processes. On the other hand, the top-down does not allow lower level processes to direct higher-level ones. To overcome those deficiencies, it is used the interactive

model. With this model, the low reading skill reader, at the levels of grapheme and word, can comprehend a text by using other sources of knowledge.

In reading comprehension, some strategies, which are related to the bottom-up or the top-down models, have been produced. For helping the beginner reader, we can use graphemic rules and patterns (Brown, 2001:306). There are micro skills that can be used for that purpose. Some of them are as follows:

1. Discriminate among the distinctive graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.
2. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory.
3. Recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
4. Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g. tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.
5. Recognize the rhetorical forms of written discourse and their significance for interpretation.
6. Recognize the communicative functions of written texts, according to form and purpose.
7. Infer context that is not explicit by using background knowledge.
8. Develop and use a battery of reading strategies such as scanning and skimming, detecting discourse markers, guessing the meaning of words from context, and activating schemata for the interpretation of texts.

Based on those micro skills, the exercises are developed in this report.

In addition, there are three genres of text which are taught in Junior High School. They are recount, procedure, and narrative. Narrative text consists of a story or tale in which includes a conflict that is followed by a resolution. The generic structure of a narrative is as follows:

Orientation – complication – resolution

### 3. The Procedure of Developing Exercises

The steps or procedure in developing the exercises of the text can be read at Appendix A (Lesson Plan). Meanwhile, the material is on Appendix B (Exercises).

### 4. Analysis

Based on the micro skills in the theoretical background, the exercises of the reading text that is used can be analysis as follows:

No.	Micro skills	Task	Number
1.	Discriminate among the distinctive graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.	6	1-5
2.	Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory.	7	1-5
3.	Recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.	4	5, 11, 20
4.	Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g. tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.	9	1-4
5.	Recognize the rhetorical forms of written discourse and their significance for interpretation.	5	1-3
6.	Recognize the communicative functions of written texts, according to form and purpose.	4	3, 20
7.	Infer context that is not explicit by using background knowledge.	4	1, 2, 4
8.	Develop and use a battery of reading strategies such as scanning and skimming, detecting discourse markers, guessing the meaning of words from context, and activating schemata for the interpretation of texts.	4	1-20

### 5. Conclusion

Reading is one of the four English skills. The students have to be able to increase their ability on the skills, especially reading because this skill is important to support the other skills.

On the exercises, the micro skills in comprehending the reading text have been implemented. It is hoped that such kind of exercises can give aid for the students to develop their understanding in the text.

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