Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing

I. S. P. Nation

ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series

Teaching ESL/EFL
Reading and Writing

Using a framework based on principles of teaching and learning, this guide for teachers and teacher trainees provides a wealth of suggestions for helping learners at all levels of proficiency develop their reading and writing skills and fluency. By following these suggestions, which are organized around four strands—meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development—teachers will be able to design and present a balanced program for their students.

Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing, and its companion text, *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*, are similar in format and the kinds of topics covered, but do not need to be used together. Drawing on research and theory in applied linguistics, their focus is strongly hands-on, featuring

- easily applied principles,
- a large number of useful teaching techniques, and
- guidelines for testing and monitoring.

All Certificate, Diploma, Masters and Doctoral courses for teachers of English as a second or foreign language include a teaching methods component. The texts are designed for and have been field tested in such programs.

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Preface

This book (and its companion book *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*) is intended for teachers of English as a second or foreign language. It can be used both for experienced teachers and for teachers in training. In its earlier forms this book has been used on graduate diploma and Masters level courses, and with teachers in training.

The book has two major features. First, it has a strong practical emphasis—around one hundred teaching techniques are described in the book. Second, it tries to provide a balanced programme for developing the skills of reading and writing. It does this by using a framework called the four strands. These are called strands because they run through the whole course. They are the strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. In a well-balanced language programme covering the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, each of the four strands should have roughly equal amounts of time. The organisation of the book largely reflects these four strands.

I have attempted to write the book using clear and simple language. Wherever possible, technical terms have been avoided. However, in a few cases, with terms such as *phonics*, *topic type*, and *extensive reading*, technical terms have been used and explained in the text. This book thus does not require any previous knowledge of second language acquisition theory or language teaching methodology.

Chapter 1 compares first and second language reading. The first six chapters look at reading, and the last four at writing. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on beginning reading. Special attention is given to phonics and there

is a very useful related appendix of spelling–sound correspondences. Chapters 4 and 5 look at extensive reading and fluency. Chapter 6 looks at assessing reading, paying particular attention to the reasons for testing. Chapter 7 presents a range of ways for supporting writing and Chapter 8 examines the writing process. Chapter 9 has relevance for both reading and writing. It looks at topic types which describe the kinds of information contained in different kinds of texts. Chapter 10 examines a range of ways that can be used to respond to written work.

As a result of working through this book, teachers should be able to design a well-balanced reading and writing course which provides a good range of opportunities for learning. The teacher's most important job is to plan so that the learners are learning useful things, so that the best conditions for learning occur, and so that they are getting a balance of learning opportunities. This book should help teachers do this.

Wherever possible, the ideas in this book are research based. This is reflected in the principles which are described at the end of Chapter 1 and which are referred to throughout the book. The idea which lies behind these principles is that it is not a wise idea to follow closely a particular method of language teaching, such as communicative language teaching or the direct method. It is much more sensible to draw, where possible, on research-based principles which can be adapted or discarded as new research evidence becomes available.

There are many people who should be thanked for their help in the production of this book. Eli Hinkel gave me a great deal of very supportive encouragement to get me to offer the book for publication. Mary Hillemeier and Naomi Silverman of Taylor & Francis were similarly enthusiastic and took away a lot of the burden of publication. The reviewers of the book before it was published provided many helpful and frank comments which led me to see the book through others' eyes. I am very grateful for this. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my own teachers, H.V. George and Helen Barnard, who were also my mentors and colleagues. They were both great teachers and wonderful people, and their legacy is reflected in the very large number of grateful students who remember and apply their teaching.

Both this book and its companion volume, *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*, were largely written and used in teacher training courses before they were offered for publication. There was thus a lot of input from the teachers who were studying on these courses.

I would feel that the book's purpose has been achieved if, as a result of reading it, teachers learn some new techniques and activities, understand why these activities are used, and see how they fit into the larger programme.

Teaching English and training teachers of English are challenging but very rewarding professions. I have been involved in them for a very long time and they have given me a great deal of enjoyment. I hope that this enjoyment is apparent in the book and that it will help readers gain similar enjoyment.

Learning to Read in Another Language

In the companion volume to this one, *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking* (Nation and Newton, 2009), the four strands of a language course are described. The basic idea behind the four strands is that, in a well-balanced language course, equal time is given to each of the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Meaning-focused input involves getting input through listening and reading where the learners' focus is on understanding the message and where only a small proportion of language features are outside the learners' present level of proficiency. In a reading and writing programme, extensive reading is likely to be the major source of meaning-focused input.

Meaning-focused output involves the learners producing language through speaking and writing where the learners' focus is on others understanding the message. Meaning-focused output occurs when learners write essays and assignments, when they write letters, when they write a diary, when they send email and text messages to each other, and when they write about their experience.

Language-focused learning involves deliberate attention to language features both in the context of meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output, and in decontextualised learning and teaching. In the reading and writing programme, language-focused learning occurs in intensive reading, when learners consult dictionaries in reading and writing, when they get language-focused feedback on their writing, when they deliberately learn new vocabulary for receptive or productive use,

when they practise spelling, when they concentrate on learning to write or form written letters of the alphabet, and when they study grammar and discourse features. There are lots of ways of making language-focused learning a part of the course, but a teacher needs to be careful that this does not take up more than 25 percent of the total course time.

Fluency development is often neglected in courses, partly because teachers and learners feel that they should always be learning something new. Fluency development involves making the best use of what is already known. The best-known kind of fluency development is speed reading where learners focus on increasing their reading speed while still maintaining good comprehension. For speed reading courses to work well with learners of English as a second or foreign language, the reading material needs to be well within the learners' level of proficiency. There should be little or no unknown vocabulary or grammatical features in the speed reading texts. Writing fluency also needs to get attention in a well-balanced course, especially where learners need to sit a written test as part of academic study and where they have to write under time pressure.

These four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development need to take up roughly equal time in a language course. As we shall see, there are many ways of getting this balance, and the way this is done depends on local conditions, teacher preferences, the way the classes are divided up and scheduled, and timetabling constraints. What is important is that over a period of time probably no greater than a month or two, there is a roughly equal amount of time given to each of these four strands, and that the necessary conditions exist for the strands to occur. In this book, this idea of the four strands will be applied to goals as diverse as learning to spell, learning to write, and becoming fluent in reading.

The first six chapters of this book focus largely on reading, and the next four on writing, although links will be made between these skills and also with the skills of listening and speaking. This is a lot to cover in such a small number of chapters, so this book should be seen as a practical overview of what can be done in the reading and writing programme. There are long traditions of research into reading and writing and this research is drawn on particularly to justify certain teaching and learning procedures.

Let us now look at a beginner learning to read.

Learning to Read in the First Language

People learn to read their first language in a wide variety of circumstances. The following description is of a fortunate child in a fortunate country where reading is well prepared for and well taught. An excellent account of

the teaching of reading to native speakers in New Zealand can be found in Smith and Elley (1997).

Children are prepared for reading at an early age by listening to stories, being read to, and interacting with adults and others about the stories they hear. This is done not with the main purpose of preparing a child for reading but as a way that parents and others interact with, show affection for, and entertain and educate children. The interaction involves asking questions about what is going to happen in the story, getting the child to complete sentences in a known story, talking about the interesting and scary parts of the story, and generally having fun.

When native-speaking children start to learn to read, they already have a large vocabulary of several thousand words which includes most of the words they will meet in early reading. They also have good control of the grammar of the language, have a lot of knowledge about books and reading conventions, and have had many many stories read to them. They are very keen to learn how to read.

They begin formal schooling at the age of about five or six. The teacher and learners work with books that are interesting, are well illustrated, use language that is close to spoken language, and are not too long. The texts contain a lot of repetition, and are often very predictable but in an interesting way.

The techniques used to teach reading are largely meaning-focused. That is, they give primary attention to understanding and enjoying the story. They include shared reading, guided reading and independent reading. A small amount of attention may be given to phonological awareness and phonics but this is in the context of enjoying the story and only takes a very small amount of time. Let us now look at the typical techniques used to teach reading to young native speakers.

Shared Reading

The learners gather around the teacher and the teacher reads a story to the learners from a very large blown-up book while showing them the pictures and the written words. The teacher involves the learners in the reading by asking them what they think will happen next and getting them to comment on the story. Where they can, the learners read the words aloud together. The procedure is an attempt to make the shared book activity like a parent reading a child a bedtime story.

The learners are asked to choose what blown-up book they want read to them and the same book may be used in the shared book activity on several occasions. In the later readings, the learners are expected to join in the reading much more. At other times, learners can take the small version of the blown-up book and read it individually or in pairs. After a reading,

the learners draw, write, act out the story or study some of the language in the story.

The **shared book** activity is a very popular reading activity in New Zealand pre-schools and primary schools. It was developed by a New Zealander, Don Holdaway, and is such a normal part of a primary teacher's repertoire that publishers now print blown-up book versions of popular children's books.

The purpose of the shared book activity is to get the learners to see the fun element in reading. In the activity, this fun comes from the interesting story, the interaction between the teacher and the learners in predicting and commenting on the story, and the rereading of favourite stories.

Teachers can make blown-up books. Although a blown-up book takes some time to make, it will be used and re-used and well repays the effort of making it or the cost of buying it. The books also make attractive displays in the classroom. The shared book activity was used in one of the experimental groups in the Elley and Mangubhai (1981) Book Flood experiment. Blown-up books can be bought from the following publishers: Nelson Price Milburn (http://www.newhouse.co.nz/), Giltedge Publishing (http://www.giltedgepublishing.co.nz/). Titles include *Where Do Monsters Live?*; *Bears, Bears Everywhere*; *Mr Noisy*; *What Do You See?*; *Pirate Pete*; *William's Wet Week*; *The Sunflower Tree*.

Guided Reading

Guided reading can be done silently or with a child reading aloud to a friend, parent or teacher. Before the reading the learner and teacher talk about the book. Research by Wong and McNaughton (1980) showed that for the learner they studied, pre-reading discussion resulted in a greater percentage of words initially correct, and a greater percentage of errors self-corrected. The teacher and the learner look at the title of the book and make sure that all the words in the title are known. Then they talk about the pictures in the story and make predictions about what might happen in the story and talk about any knowledge the learner already has about the topic. Important words in the story are talked about but need not be pointed to in their written form. So, before the learner actually starts to read the story, the ideas and important words in the story are talked about and clarified. Then the learner begins to read.

If the learner is reading aloud to the teacher, then it is good to use the pause, prompt, praise procedure (Glynn et al., 1989; Smith and Elley, 1997: 134–136). This means that when the learner starts to struggle over a word the teacher does not rush in with the answer but pauses for the learner to have time to make a good attempt at it. If the learner continues to struggle the teacher gives a helpful prompt, either from the meaning of the story or

sentence or from the form of the word. When the learner finally reads the word correctly the teacher then praises the attempt.

If the learner is reading silently, then a part of the text is read and there is a discussion of what has just been read and prediction of the next part of the text.

Independent Reading

In **independent reading** the learner chooses a book to read and quietly gets on with reading it. During this quiet period of class time, the teacher may also read or may use the time as an opportunity for individual learners to come up to read to the teacher. In beginners' classes there is a set time each day for independent reading and learners are expected to read out of class as well. Other names for extended independent reading are **sustained silent reading** (SSR) and **drop everything and read** (DEAR).

Learning to read is also helped by learning to write and learning through listening. In writing as in reading, first language teachers emphasise the communication of messages and expect the learners gradually to approximate normal writing over a period of time.

Research indicates that the best age to learn to read is about six to seven years old. Starting early at five has no long-term advantages and may make it more difficult for some learners to experience success in reading. At the age of about six or seven children are intellectually ready to begin reading.

It should be clear from this description that native speakers learning to read have the advantage of bringing a lot of language knowledge and a lot of experience to learning to read. They might have the disadvantage of beginning to learn a complex skill when they may not be quite ready for it.

Learning to Read in Another Language

There are numerous factors that affect the difficulty of learning to read in another language. Table 1.1 focuses on three factors but as the footnote to the table suggests, there are other factors that are important particularly when working with a group of learners. Let us look at the factors in Table 1.1 by focusing on a learner from a particular language background, Thai, who is in the very early stages of learning English. The learner is 12 years old and can already read fluently in Thai.

A Thai learner beginning to read English will know very little English vocabulary. There are English loan words in Thai like *free*, but a Thai learner probably does not realise that they have an English origin. This means that the initial reading material will need to be much more controlled than the material aimed at young native speakers of English who already know close to five thousand words. A Thai learner may also need

much more preparation or pre-teaching before they start on their reading. These are all disadvantages. There are, however, numerous advantages that the Thai learner has. First, the Thai learner can already read Thai and so knows a lot about reading. Thai is an alphabetic language so the Thai learner is already very familiar with the alphabetic principle; that is, that letters can represent sounds and these can go together to make up words. Thai script is not related to English script, so the Thai learner will have to spend time learning letter shapes. An Italian learner of English does not have this problem because Italian uses substantially the same script as English. Second, if the Thai learner is good at reading Thai, the learner will have many reading strategies like guessing from context, scanning, skimming, and careful decoding which could be carried over to the reading of English if the conditions for reading were suitable. There is evidence, for example, that training in increasing reading speed in the first language can transfer to another language if the materials in the other language are at a suitable level (Bismoko and Nation, 1974; Cramer, 1975). Third, reading is largely a valued and enjoyed activity in Thai society so there may also be positive attitudes to reading carried over to English. Fourth, a 12 year old is much more able to learn to read than a five year old. A 12 year old has much more developed cognitive skills and is much more able to learn from direct instruction. Table 1.1 summarises these characteristics.

Principles for Teaching Reading

The following principles can guide the design and practice of a reading programme. For another list of principles, see Williams (1986).

Meaning-focused Input

- Practice and training in reading should be done for a range of reading purposes. A reading course should cover these purposes—reading to search for information (including skimming and scanning), reading to learn, reading for fun, reading to integrate information, reading to critique texts, and reading to write. These are looked at throughout the following chapters.
- Learners should be doing reading that is appropriate to their language proficiency level. The course should include reading simplified material at a range of levels, particularly extensive reading of graded readers. Chapter 4 looks at this in detail.
- Reading should be used as a way of developing language proficiency. Learners should read with 98 percent coverage of the vocabulary in the text so that they can learn the remaining 2 percent through guessing from context (Chapter 3).

Table 1.1 L1/L2 Differences for an Individual Beginning to Read

Characteristics	General effects	Particular effects
L1 beginning readers already know a lot of the language they are beginning to read (sounds, vocabulary, grammar, discourse). L2 learners do not.	Learning to read an L2 involves a great deal of language learning.	L2 learners need very controlled texts. L2 learners need a greater amount of pre-reading activities.
L2 beginners can already read in their L1.	L2 beginners have general cognitive skills. They have preconceptions and attitudes to reading. They have language specific skills. There will be interference and facilitation effects between the L1 and L2.	L2 beginners do not need to learn what they can transfer from the L1. They may need to change their attitudes to reading. Learners may have to learn a different writing system.
L2 beginners are usually older than L1 beginners.	L2 learners have greater metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness.	It is easy to transfer L1 skills. L2 learners can use more explicit approaches and tools like dictionaries.

This table has been kept simple by focusing on only one learner who is just beginning to read. It is more complicated if you have several learners with different L1s, different L2 proficiencies, different L1 reading proficiencies, and different motivations for reading.

Meaning-focused Output

- Reading should be related to other language skills. The course should involve listening, speaking and writing activities related to the reading. See, for example, Simcock (1993) using the **ask and answer** technique and several others described later in this book.

Language-focused Learning

- Learners should be helped to develop the skills and knowledge needed for effective reading. The course should work on the sub-skills of reading and the language features needed to read, including phonemic awareness activities, phonics, spelling practice (Chapter 2), vocabulary learning using word cards, and grammar study. Some of this can be done through intensive reading (Chapter 3).
- Learners should be given training and practice in a range of reading strategies. These strategies could include—previewing, setting a purpose, predicting, posing questions, connecting to background knowledge, paying attention to text structure, guessing words from context,

critiquing, and reflecting on the text. Janzen and Stoller (1998) describe a similar list of strategies.
- Learners should be given training and practice in integrating a range of strategies. Learners should be familiar with a strategy package procedure like reciprocal teaching or concept-oriented reading (CORI) (see Chapter 3).
- Learners should become familiar with a range of text structures, such as those used in newspaper reports, stories, recounts and information reports.

Fluency Development
- Learners should be helped and pushed to develop fluency in reading. They need to read material that is very familiar and contains no unknown language features. There should also be speed reading practice in word recognition and in reading for understanding. These can include activities like speed reading, repeated reading, paired reading, scanning, and skimming. Chapter 5 focuses on reading fluency.
- Learners should enjoy reading and feel motivated to read. Learners should have access to interesting texts and be involved in activities like listening to stories, independent reading, and shared reading (blown-up books). Native-speaking children like to read scary books, comics and cartoons, books about sports and magazines about popular culture (Worthy, Moorman and Turner, 1999). These are not usually found at school.
- Learners should read a lot. This can be monitored and encouraged through the use of extensive reading and issue logs.

We will examine these principles in detail in later chapters of this book. A well-thought out reading course can be the core of the language programme as it can give rise to activities in the other skills of listening, speaking, and writing, and can provide the opportunity for a useful, deliberate focus on language features. It can quickly become an effective means of showing that language learning can be successful and enjoyable. The four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development are discussed at length in Chapter 1 of the companion volume to this book, *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking* (Nation and Newton, 2009).

Learning to Recognise and Spell Words

An essential part of the reading skill is the skill of being able to recognise written forms and to connect them with their spoken forms and their meanings. This involves recognising known words and also deciphering unfamiliar words.

There has been considerable debate in first language reading over the role and nature of direct systematic teaching of word recognition skills. See Moorman, Blanton and McLaughlin (1994) for an example of this. There is also debate over the role of language-focused activities, such as reading aloud (see Griffin, 1992; Rounds, 1992). The position taken in this book is that there needs to be a balance of the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development, and there is thus a role for appropriate amounts of formal word recognition instruction. The principles that should guide this teaching are that most attention can be given to rules and items that occur frequently, are simple, and are regular.

Prerequisites for Formal Reading Instruction

To be able to benefit from instruction on spelling rules, learners need to: (1) know at least some of the letter shapes; (2) be aware that words are made up of separable sounds (phonemic awareness); (3) know basic English writing conventions (we read from left to right, beginning at the top and moving down the page); and (4) know the spoken forms of most of the words that will be met in the initial stages of reading.

Learning Letter Shapes

If a second language learner is already able to read in their first language, and their first language uses the same alphabet as English, then little if any letter shape learning will be needed. A native speaker of Malay who can read Malay already knows the letter shapes needed for reading English. They may have to apply different spelling-sound rules to these shapes but the written forms are not a problem. Learners who are not literate in their first language, or whose language uses a different writing system, like Arabic or Japanese, may need to learn to recognise the letter shapes. Because of the detailed recognition skills that are needed, it may be most effective to teach learners how to write the letters rather than just rely on reception. Activities can include tracing over letters; repeated copying of letters of the alphabet; delayed copying (Hill, 1969) where the learners look, look away, and write from memory; letter matching of flash cards (find the pairs); and letter dictation. Letters of similar shapes *p, d, b, g,* should not be learned at the same time as they are likely to interfere with each other. There may be some value in practising letter patterns, for example, ⟨⟩, or ⟨⟩, but this is probably more useful for cursive writing and developing writing fluency.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the knowledge that spoken words are made up of sounds that can be separated, that is, that /kæt/ (cat) is made up of the sounds /k æ t/. If the learner can already read in their first language, and the writing system of the first language is alphabetic, the learner will already have phonemic awareness. To get a clearer idea of the nature of phonemic awareness, see Table 2.1 which describes two tests of phonemic awareness.

In essence, phonemic awareness is not awareness of particular sounds. It is awareness of the general principle that words are made up of separable sounds. It is likely that learners who are not literate in their L1 but who are above the age of seven or eight will already have phonemic awareness in their L1 but this should be checked. Learners who are between four and six years old could be tested for phonemic awareness and, if necessary, could be given phonemic awareness activities (see Table 2.2). Phonemic awareness and letter knowledge are the two best predictors of how well first language children just entering school will do at learning to read during the first two years of school. Phonemic awareness training can have positive long-term effects on spelling.

In the vast majority of cases, learners of English as a second language will not need phonemic awareness activities because they will already have this knowledge.

Table 2.1 Tests of Phonemic Awareness

Phoneme deletion test (Bruce, 1964)

What word would remain if this sound was taken away?
(Practice words *c-at, b-r-ight, crie-d*). Takes about 10 minutes.

1. S-t-and (middle)	11. S-top (first)	21. Thin-k (last)
2. J-am (first)	12. Far-m (last)	22. P-late (first)
3. Fair-y (last)	13. Mon-k-ey (middle)	23. S-n-ail (middle)
4. Ha-n-d (middle)	14. S-pin (first)	24. B-ring (first)
5. Star-t (last)	15. For-k (last)	25. Pin-k (last)
6. Ne-s-t (middle)	16. C-old (first)	26. Le-f-t (middle)
7. F-rock (first)	17. Part-y (last)	27. Car-d (last)
8. Ten-t (last)	18. We-n-t (middle)	28. S-p-oon (middle)
9. Lo-s-t (middle)	19. F-r-og (middle)	29. H-ill (first)
10. N-ice (first)	20. N-ear (first)	30. Ever-y (last)

Phoneme segmentation test (Yopp, 1988)

Today we're going to play a different word game. I'm going to say a word, and I want you to break the word apart. You are going to tell me each sound in the word in order. For example, if I say *old*, you will say *o-l-d*. Let's try a few words together.

(Three more examples are given *ride, go, man*) Total score = 22. Takes about 5–10 minutes.

dog	lay	keep	race
fine	zoo	no	three
she	job	wave	in
grew	ice	that	at
red	top	me	by
sat	do		

Table 2.2 Phonemic Awareness Activities

Activities
The most basic procedures involve: (1) the teacher saying separate sounds (/t/ /e/ /n/) and the learner putting the separate heard sounds together to make a familiar word (ten) (i.e. phoneme blending); and (2) the learner saying the separate sounds of a word for the teacher to guess what the word is (i.e. phoneme segmentation). These activities can be done as a game. Other activities include:

1 phoneme isolation (What is the first sound in *run*?)
2 phoneme identification (What sound is the same in *rat, run, ripe*?)
3 phoneme deletion (What word do we have if we take /t/ out of *stand*?)

Principles
• Phonemic awareness activities should be done with known words.
• Phonemic awareness activities should be fun.

Writing Conventions

English has the following writing conventions. Not all languages follow the same conventions.

1. Writing goes from left to right (cf. Arabic—right to left, Japanese—top to bottom).
2. The lines of writing come one under the other starting from the top of the page (cf. Japanese).
3. The pages go from front to back (cf. Japanese—back to front).
4. Words are separated by spaces (cf. Thai—no spaces between words).
5. Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark.
6. Quotation marks are used to signal speech or citation.
7. English has upper case (capital) letters and lower case (small) letters. The use of capital letters may carry an extra meaning.
8. Sentences are organised into paragraphs.
9. In formal and academic writing there are conventions that need to be learned, such as the use of bold and italics, the use of headings and sub-headings, the use of indentation, the use of footnotes, the use of references, and page numbering.

In early reading, learners may need to be checked for knowledge of these conventions, and some may need to be pointed out and explained.

Spoken Language and Reading

The experience approach to reading is based on the idea that when learning to read, learners should bring a lot of experience and knowledge to their reading so that they only have to focus on small amounts of new information. Sylvia Ashton-Warner's (1963) approach to teaching young native speakers to read is an excellent example of this. Here are the steps in her approach.

1. Each learner draws a picture illustrating something that recently happened to them or something that they are very interested in.
2. One by one the learners take their picture to the teacher who asks them what it is about.
3. The teacher then writes the learner's description below the picture exactly as the learner said it using the same words the learner said, even if it is non-standard English.
4. This then becomes the learner's reading text for that day. The learner reads it back to the teacher and then takes it away to practise reading it, and to read it to classmates, friends and family.

5. These pictures and texts all written by the same learner are gathered together to be a personal reading book for that learner.

Note that most of the knowledge needed to read and comprehend the text is directly within the experience of the learner. The ideas come from the learner, the words and sentences come from the learner, and the organisation of the text comes from the learner. The only learning needed is to match the new written forms provided by the teacher with this knowledge.

It is possible to learn to read a foreign language without being able to speak it, but learning to read is much easier if the learner already has spoken control of the language features that are being met in the reading. Reading texts used with young native speakers of English use language that is already known to them and are on topics that interest them. However, young native speakers learning to read have an oral vocabulary size of around 5,000 words. Non-native speakers will have a very much smaller English vocabulary and so if native-speaker texts are used to teach second language reading, they need to be checked to see if they contain known and useful vocabulary.

Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle

Learning phonics is learning the systematic relationships between written letters and sounds, for example, learning that the written form p is usually pronounced /p/. At a very general level, learning phonics means learning the alphabetic principle, that is that letters and groups of letters represent sounds in a largely systematic way. At a detailed level, learning phonics involves learning the range of spelling-sound correspondences that exist in a particular language.

Some languages like Chinese do not follow the alphabetic principle. They do not have separate letters that represent the individual sounds that go together to make a spoken word. Other languages follow the alphabetic principle in a very regular way. The Maori language, for example, has 12 consonant sounds and five vowel sounds (10 if long and short versions of vowels are not counted as the same sound). These are represented by 11 consonant letters and five vowel letters. The only exceptions to a one letter-one sound (not necessarily one phoneme) rule are that the letters wh represent a sound which is not /w/ plus /h/, and the letters ng represent a sound /ŋ/ which is not /n/ plus /g/. After a few lessons in Maori pronunciation, it is possible for anyone familiar with the English alphabet to learn all the Maori spelling-sound correspondences in a few minutes.

This is an over-simplification because there are different dialects of Maori. However, there are frequent, systematic relationships in English that can provide a good basis for effective phonics instruction. Here are

some English spelling-sound rules that are regular and very, very frequent. The letter b is pronounced /b/, f—/f/, k—/k/, m—/m/, v—/v/.

There are exceptions to these rules, but most of the exceptions are rule-based (bb—/b/, mm—/m/) or do not occur in many words.

As a fluent reader of English you already know the regular rules and can thus make a reasonable pronunciation of written words that you have probably never seen before—*lyncean, glogg, cordwain, sclerotium, tussah.*

If a teacher wants to do some phonics instruction, it is important to know what the most useful rules in English are and to be able to determine whether it is better to deal with a particular word phonically or simply to encourage learners to memorise the spelling of the whole word. Appendix 1 lists the important rules for English and provides some guidance and practice in applying the rules. By working through Appendix 1 you should be able to do the following things.

1. Make an ordered systematic syllabus for phonics instruction. In particular, decide what phonics rules deserve attention early in a reading programme.
2. Be aware of the most common exceptions to the rules.
3. Where there are conflicting rules, for example a—/a:/, a—/æ/, decide which one should get attention first.
4. Decide whether a word is regularly spelled or not. In other words, work out the learning burden of its written form.
5. Interpret errors in learners' reading aloud to see if they are rule-based or not.

The Role of Phonics in a Reading Programme

Phonics can fit into a reading programme in the following ways.

Isolated Words and Words in Texts

- Help learners in using phonics to read specially chosen isolated words.
- Introduce phonics with known words.
- Ask students to read interesting texts that use regular spelling-sound correspondences such as Dr Seuss books.

Individual and Class

- Use phonics in one-to-one reading instruction as a part of reading a text.
- Carry out class teaching of the most frequent, simple, regular spelling-sound correspondences.

Word Attack Skills
- Teach learners to sound out all the sounds in a word.
- Teach learners to concentrate on the first letters of a word.
- Where possible, use phonics when giving help with difficult words.

Outlandish Proposals
- Use regularised English as an intermediary step.
- Allow invented spellings that follow rules—the rule is more important than the items.

Word recognition when reading is helped by familiarity with what is being read (from having read it before or from listening to it being read), by context clues coming from the meaning of what is being read, by being able to recognise some words as complete units, and by being able to decode words phonically. It is worth drawing on all these sources of help because ultimately it is the quantity of successful reading that will contribute most to the development of reading skills, and using all these sources is more likely to guarantee success.

As phonics involves spelling-sound relationships, it is significant both for learning to read and for learning to spell.

Spelling: Productive Phonics

Being familiar with spelling-sound correspondences can be seen as a receptive skill in that it relates to the receptive skill of reading. The productive equivalent of this part of the reading skill is spelling, which is part of the skill of writing.

There has been considerable research with native speakers on the learning of spelling and the definitive collection of research reviews is Brown and Ellis's (1994) *Handbook of Spelling*. From an applied linguistics perspective, the study of research on spelling is rewarding not only for the information it provides on the teaching and learning of spelling, but also because it provides valuable insights into many of the central issues involved in second language learning. Spelling is a very limited and clearly defined area, involving only 26 letters and a definable set of combinations of letters. Working within this limited area makes the issues clearer and easier to deal with in a comprehensive way.

Table 2.3 lists the most important of these with a brief summary of findings from L1 research. Let us look briefly at some of these.

Deliberate and Incidental Learning

In the learning of both grammatical and vocabulary items there has been debate over the roles of incidental learning (acquisition in Krashen's

Table 2.3 Issues in Spelling that Apply to Other Language Levels

Issues	Findings
Deliberate versus incidental learning	Deliberate analytic learning can speed up learning and can help with learning problems. Regular tests help. Most learning is incidental. Substantial reading improves spelling.
System learning versus item learning	Some words can be dealt with by rules, others have to be learned as unique items. The unpredictability of the English spelling system is a major obstacle to learning to spell.
A single kind of learning versus interactive systems	Alphabetic learning interacts with lexical learning.
The effect of other levels of language on this level and this level on others	Phonological awareness affects spelling and has long-term effects on spelling. Spelling affects word recognition. Poor spellers have problems in writing—they use avoidance strategies. Phonological awareness affects reading and reading can affect phonological awareness. Writing the letter shapes helps learning.
The direction of the effect	Spelling affects use, use affects spelling.
The effect of the origin of the feature	Etymology affects spelling.
The treatment of irregularity	Some high frequency items are irregular. Irregular items are learned as lexical units.
The effect of frequency on the type of storage	Highly frequent items, even regular ones, are stored as lexical items. Regular low frequency items are dealt with by rules.
The effect of age on learning	Older learners are better at deliberate learning.
The role of developmental sequences	Complex items need to be learned through a series of stages.
The treatment of error	Letting students invent spellings can have positive effects.
The effect of the first language	The writing system of the first language can have positive and negative effects on learning the second language.

(1981) terms) and deliberate learning. Some argue that incidental learning is what really matters and that at best deliberate learning can only play an indirect secondary role. In vocabulary learning, however, there is considerable evidence supporting the deliberate learning of vocabulary as part of a well-balanced programme (Elgort, 2007). First language research on the learning of spelling also supports having both deliberate and incidental learning. Although most learning of the many sound-spelling correspondences is picked up incidentally and good readers are usually good spellers, deliberate analytic learning can speed up learning and can help with learning difficulties.

System Learning and Item Learning

Partly as a result of the impact of corpus linguistics, there has been considerable debate over whether learners develop substantial control of a complex grammatical system or whether what seems to be grammar learning is really the accumulation of knowledge of numerous collocations. That is, much language use is not rule-based but is based on the use of pre-fabricated units (see Pinker, 1999, for an interesting discussion of this). Research on the learning of complex words like *decompose, combinability* and *unrefugeelike* suggests that high frequency complex words are stored as whole, ready-made units. Low frequency complex words are recreated each time they are met or used. That is, low frequency items are dealt with according to systematic rules, while high frequency items are dealt with by accessing memorised complete units. Frequency and complexity combine nicely in this argument. High frequency items are relatively small in number so there are not too many to store. If they were processed according to rules, because they are very frequent a lot of processing time would be spent dealing with them and that would be difficult. Thus storing them as ready-made items is the most efficient option. Low frequency items are very numerous. There are too many of them to store as ready-made complex units. However, low frequency items make up only a small proportion of the running words so dealing with them according to rules does not occupy too much on-line processing time. Thus, processing them according to rules is the best option.

Research on spelling supports this high frequency/low frequency distinction. Many high frequency words are irregularly spelled and must be stored as memorised items. Low frequency words tend to be more regularly spelled and can be dealt with by the application of rules.

First Language Effects on Second Language Learning

In its simplest form, the contrastive analysis hypothesis argued that second language learning can be strongly affected by first language knowledge.

Where there are similarities between languages, second language learning will be easier. Where there are differences, second language learning will be more difficult. Complications in the hypothesis arise from the ways in which a second language is learned, and in the nature of the similarities and differences between the two languages.

There is evidence of positive and negative effects of the first language on the second at the levels of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Spelling is no exception, and there is plenty of evidence of first language spellings having both positive and negative effects according to the degrees of similarity and difference between the language items and rules.

Learning to Spell

English spelling is difficult. Although there are many rules, there are also many irregularities and decision points where competing rules need to be chosen. Learning how to spell in more regularly spelled languages like Indonesian, Samoan or Finnish is a much easier task. If learners have poor spelling skills, they will typically avoid writing tasks, and when writing will avoid words that they find difficult to spell.

One way of organising an approach to spelling improvement is to ensure that spelling is dealt with across the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development.

Spelling and Meaning-focused Input

The more learners read, the more their spelling will improve. Continual receptive exposure to the written forms of words provides a useful basis for later written production (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1991). In the early stages of learning to read English as an L1, the number of words learners can read is much greater than the number they can spell and the size of this gap persists for several years.

Spelling and Meaning-focused Output

Spelling is particularly important for writing and at the very least, having to write can make learners aware of gaps in their spelling knowledge.

In the early stages of writing by young native speakers, teachers accept the invented spellings they produce as useful steps on the way to more accurate spelling.

Writing activities that can help with spelling are copying, delayed copying, read and write from memory, dictation, the various forms of guided writing, writing with the help of a dictionary, and free writing. Too much

attention to spelling when responding to learners' writing can result in an unwillingness to write or avoidance strategies where learners only use very familiar words.

Spelling and Language-focused Learning

There are numerous techniques for giving deliberate attention to spelling. The critical factor is making sure that there is an appropriate balance of each of the four strands so that there is some deliberate attention to spelling but this attention does not become excessive. Deliberate attention to spelling can include the following.

The Deliberate Memorisation of the Spelling of Individual Words

Cover and Retrieve

The learner writes a list of difficult to spell words down the left-hand side of the page. The first letter or two of each word is written next to it, for example

    yacht   y
    occurrence   o

The words are studied and then covered and each word is written from memory using the first letter clue. The first letter is written again so that the activity can be repeated.

    yacht   yacht   y

Using Analogies

Working with the teacher or in pairs or small groups, the learners think of known words that share similar spelling features to words that they have difficulty in spelling. For example, if learning to spell *apply*, the learners think of the known words *reply*, *supply*, etc.

Using Word Parts

For advanced learners, drawing attention to word-building units can help. For example, *separate* contains the root *par* which is also in *part*. The spelling is therefore *separate* not *seperate*.

Pronouncing the Word in the Way it is Spelled

A word like *yacht* can be deliberately mispronounced as /yæt čt/ as a kind of mnemonic for the spelling.

Visualising

Learners look at a word, close their eyes and try to see the spelling of the word in their mind. If a part of the word is particularly difficult

to remember, try to think of that part in a striking colour such as red.

Tests

Teachers can have regular tests to encourage learners to work on spelling. These can be dictation tests or individualised tests as in the cover and retrieve technique where the learners each give the teacher a list of words on one sheet and on another sheet a list of the first letters of the words. The sheet with the first letters is used for the test, and the other for marking.

The Deliberate Study of Regular Correspondences and Rules

Noticing Patterns

Words following a similar set of sound-spelling correspondences are grouped together so that learners see several examples of the same correspondence, for example

day, play, say, may, stay

Learners' involvement in such noticing can be deepened by getting learners to work in pairs grouping such words from a mixed list, by dictating the words to the learners, by getting learners to suggest other words that follow the pattern, and by following up these activities with a dictation test drawing on a variety of patterns.

Studying Rules

A few very common complicated rules deserve a bit of deliberate study, particularly for advanced learners. The most useful of these rules are:

1. *i* before *e* except after *c*
2. free and checked vowels.

The rule for free and checked vowels is rather complicated but it is very useful because it provides explanations for the doubling of consonants when adding affixes, the function of final silent *e*, and the spelling and pronunciation of a large number of words. To understand the rule it is necessary to know what the free vowels are and what the checked (or limited or short) vowels are. The free vowels *a e i o u* are pronounced / ei i: ai ou u:/, which is the same as their names (for example, the name for the letter *a* is pronounced /ei/). The checked vowels *a e i o u* are pronounced /æ e i o u/. Some people call free and checked vowels long and short vowels but this is misleading from a phonological point of view because there is much more than a length difference between the two sets of pronunciations.

Here are the rules associated with the free and checked vowels. These rules apply only to stressed syllables.

1. Free vowels occur in the pattern

   free vowel+consonant+vowel.
   date, medium

2. Checked vowels occur in the patterns

   checked vowel+consonant with nothing following the consonant
   hat, fetch, sip, lot, shut

   checked vowel+consonant+consonant (+consonant)+vowel

   happen, better,
   sitting, bottle, funny

Note (a) the single letter *x* behaves like two consonants, (b) *y* in final position acts as a vowel.

If you have understood the above explanation, you should be able to answer these questions. (Answers are supplied on page 24.)

1. What job does final silent *e* do in the following words? *plate, scene, fine, home, tune*
2. Why do you have to double the final consonant in the stem when you add *y* to the following words? *fun, fat, slop, bag*
3. Why don't you have to double the final consonant when you add *ing* or *ed* to the following words? Look at each word carefully. *weed, lengthen, push, hope*
4. Why is *occurrence* correct and not *occurence*?
5. Why is *exclamation* correct and not *exclammation*?

There are exceptions to the rules and it may be that the best use of the free/checked rule is as a way of explaining and helping to learn difficult words that follow the rules. The free and checked rules are items AV3, AV14, AV18, AV24, AV1, AV8, AV13, AV16, AV23 in Appendix 1. The exceptions are BV7.

Strategy Training

Learners should have familiar and well-practised strategies to follow to: (1) commit the spelling of a newly met word to memory; (2) find the spelling of a needed word when writing; and (3) decide how to pronounce a newly met word when reading. These strategies should be made up of activities that have already been practised in class.

A Strategy for Memorising Spellings

The activities described above in the section on deliberate memorisation can be put into a sequence that can be followed as far as is necessary for

each word. That is, first, the learner should close their eyes and try to visualise the word, that is, make a retrieval. Second, the learner should think of similarly spelled words. Third, if possible, the word can be broken into parts to see if knowing the parts helps remember the spelling. Fourth, if the word is really difficult to remember, it can be added to a list to use with the cover and retrieve technique. Alternatively, it can be placed on a word card for spaced recall practice. Ideally, learners should get plenty of practice using this strategy, and reflecting on it by thinking about it and talking about its application with other learners.

A Strategy for Finding the Spelling of a Word

Before looking up the spelling of a word in a dictionary, the learner should make an informed guess about how the word might be spelled. This can be done by thinking about other known words that sound the same and, if possible, checking that the spelling fits known rules.

A Strategy for Deciding how to Pronounce a Written Form

First, if the word looks like known words, the learner can try that pronunciation. Second, breaking the word into parts could help with getting the stress in the right place. Third, seek confirmation by asking someone who might know or by using a dictionary.

Spelling and Fluency Development

Fluency in spelling will come from large quantities of reading and writing, and from fluency practice in reading and writing. A typical writing fluency development activity is **ten minute writing** where learners write as much as they can on an easy topic in a regular, timed ten-minute period. The teacher does not correct spelling errors or grammatical errors, but responds to the content of the text encouraging the learner to write more. The speed of writing in words per minute is kept on a personal graph by each learner and their goal is to see their speed in words per minute increase. This is done about three times a week.

Designing a Focused Spelling Programme

If spelling is a significant problem for learners, it may be worthwhile giving it some focused, planned special attention. Numerous studies looking at spelling and on other learning issues have shown the positive effects of a balanced, focused programme. Table 2.4 lists general principles that can be applied to any focused programme. These are organised under the headings *affective, cognitive* and *social* to make them easier to remember and to put into practice the idea that an effective programme will approach a problem from several perspectives; in this case, the attitudes and feelings of

the learners, the knowledge involved, and the support that others can give. Table 2.4 also gives examples of application of the principles. There could be a third column in Table 2.4 and that would show the particular applications to a spelling programme. Let us take an example. Under the applications of the affective principle, *Keep learners motivated*, there is the application, *Do mastery testing*. Mastery testing involves repeated learning and testing until learners gain near perfect scores in what they have to learn. For mastery testing to work, there needs to be a clearly defined set of things to learn and there needs to be repeated and varied opportunities to do this learning. Mastery testing could be applied to a spelling programme in the following way. For a particular course, the focus may be the regularly spelled words in the first one thousand words of English. Those words would be ones that could be completely described by sections A and B of Appendix 1. Each week a few correspondences would be focused on and these would be tested by word dictation tests to see if learners had mastered the rules. If they did not score 90 percent or more on a 20-item test, they could sit another test focusing on the same correspondences. Before sitting another test, the teacher or learners could analyse the errors in the previous test and the learners could work on some practice items.

Table 2.4 can also be used as a basis for evaluating a focused programme. Not all of the applications need be used but there should be variety and balance.

Table 2.4 Features of a Good Intensive Learning Programme

Principles	Applications
Affective	
Keep learners motivated	Praise success
	Give quick feedback
	Do mastery testing
	Measure progress
	Record success on graphs or tables
Make learning fun	Use attractive aids
	Have amusing competitions
Cognitive	
Encourage thoughtful processing	Use rich associations, mnemonics, rules, retrieval, visualisation, deliberate learning, movement
	Use both analytic and holistic techniques
	Isolate and focus on problems
Plan for repetition and revision	Give regular practice
	Plan increasingly spaced revision
Provide training	Combine activities into strategies
	Train learners in strategy use
	Get learners to reflect on learning

(Continued overleaf)

Table 2.4 Continued.

Principles	Applications
Organise the items to learn in helpful ways	Group the items to learn into manageable blocks Avoid interference Group helpfully related items together
Plan for transfer of training	Provide fluency training
Social	
Provide peer support	Do peer tutoring Get learners to report progress to others Organise support groups
Aim for individual responsibility	Let learners choose what and how to learn Encourage autonomy

Note that the multi-focused approach in Table 2.4 can be applied to other things besides spelling, for example, learning to read, pronunciation, writing and so on. Spelling is only a small part of learning a language and for some learners it may not be an important focus, either because they have no problem with it or because writing is not a major part of their language use. What should be clear from this chapter is that spelling is no different from other aspects of language use. If it is given attention, this attention should be balanced and in proportion to other focuses.

Answers to the Questions on Spelling on page 21

1. Keeps the preceding vowel as a free vowel.
2. Because *y* acts as a vowel and the preceding consonant needs to be doubled so the preceding vowel remains as a checked vowel.
3. In *weed* and *hope* the vowels are free vowels so they do not need doubling of the following consonant to keep them checked. In *push, sh* acts as two consonants and keeps *u* checked. In *lengthen* the stressed syllable is the first syllable of the word and so adding *-ing* to the second syllable does not have an effect because the rule applies only to stressed syllables.
4. The *u* in *occurrence* is a checked vowel. It needs to be followed by two consonants (double *r*) so that the following vowel *e* does not make it a free vowel. If there was no double *r* the pronunciation would change.
5. It is the second *a* in *exclamation* that is in the stressed syllable and the free/checked rule only applies to stressed syllables.

Intensive Reading

Intensive study of reading texts can be a means of increasing learners' knowledge of language features and their control of reading strategies. It can also improve their comprehension skill. It fits into the language-focused learning strand of a course. The classic procedure for **intensive reading** is the grammar-translation approach where the teacher works with the learners, using the first language to explain the meaning of a text, sentence by sentence. Used on suitable texts and following useful principles, this can be a very useful procedure as long as it is only a part of the reading programme and is complemented by other language-focused learning and by extensive reading for language development and extensive reading for fluency development.

At its worst, intensive reading focuses on comprehension of a particular text with no thought being given to whether the features studied in this text will be useful when reading other texts. Such intensive reading usually involves translation and thus comprehension of the text. So, one goal of intensive reading may be comprehension of the text. The use of translation makes sure that learners understand, and when the learners do some of the translation themselves, it allows the teacher to check whether they understand.

Intensive reading may also have another goal and that is to determine what language features will get attention in the course. That is, the language features that are focused on in each text become the language syllabus for the course. This has several positive aspects. First, the language features are set in the communicative context of a text. The text can be