

I Pre-training activity: Your reading experiences

Questionnaire Reading



1. Do you regularly read? Do you enjoy reading?
2. What do you prefer reading (novels, newspapers,...)?
3. Why do you mainly read (information, pleasure, relaxation,...)?
4. When do you usually read?
5. Do you sometimes discuss your reading experiences with family members or friends?
6. What are your main problems when reading an unknown text?

Mindmapping

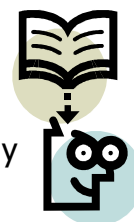
Think about the topic reading in general. What comes to your mind when you think about reading?

Work on your own or with a neighbour and develop a mindmap containing anything that comes to your mind.

Time: 20 minutes

II Quick reading and "Scanning"

Pre-reading activity: Activating your own knowledge



Before you read a text it is useful to have a close look at its title and to shortly activate your knowledge about the topic. This will make it easier for you to understand the topic of a text.

Assignment 1:

The first text you will read is about earthquakes. Briefly talk to your neighbour about what you know about earthquakes and take notes on anything that comes to your mind. Then go on reading about "scanning" on this page.

Time: 4 minutes

When you want to find out particular information given in a text, it is not necessary – even not useful – to read the whole text and to try and understand every single word of it. If your aim is to find a special aspect of a text, you "scan" the text for this information. *Scanning* means quick reading, aiming at retrieving particular information. You scan a text when looking for certain keywords or phrases and ignoring all other passages that do not contain the words or phrases you look for. In German we would call this reading strategy "suchendes Lesen".

Assignment 2:

Answer the following questions about earthquakes.

(The text is on the next page.)

Then take some notes on how you could quickly find the necessary information in the text.

You will find the solutions on pages 9-10.

Time: 5 minutes

1. Where do most of the damaging earthquakes occur?
2. What damages can an earthquake cause?
3. How many earthquakes are there every year?
4. Which instrument is used to measure the intensity of earthquakes?
5. What is the cause of an earthquake?
6. How do scientists try to predict earthquakes more efficiently?

Earthquakes

Every year earthquakes are responsible for a large number of deaths and vast amounts of destruction in various parts of the world. Most of these damaging earthquakes occur either in a narrow belt which surrounds the Pacific Ocean or in a line which extends from Burma to the Alps in Europe. Some of the destruction is directly caused by the quake itself. An example of this is the collapse of buildings as a result of vibration. Other damage results from landslides, tsunamis (large ocean waves) or major fires which are initiated by the quake.

There are about a million quakes a year. Fortunately, however, not all of them are destructive. The intensity of an earthquake is measured on the Richter Scale, which goes from 0 upward. The highest magnitude recorded to date is 8.9. Major damage generally occurs from quakes ranging upwards from 6.0. Exceptions to this are those whose epicenters are located far from inhabited areas.

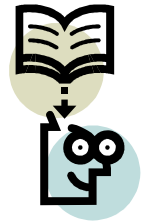
The actual cause of the quake itself is the rupturing or breaking of rocks at or below the earth's surface. This is produced by pressure which scientists believe may be due to a number of reasons, two of which are the expansion and contraction of the earth's crust and continental drift.

In order to minimize the damage and to alleviate some of the suffering resulting from earthquakes, scientists are working on ways to facilitate accurate prediction. Two of the instruments presently in use to achieve this goal are seismographs and tilt meters. The former record any shaking of the earth; by means of calculations seismologists can accurately indicate the exact time, location and size of an earthquake. The latter, as the name suggests, are used to record any changes in the tilt of the land.

From: Long, Michael, et al. Reading English for Academic Study Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1990.

III Intelligent guessing – a reading strategy making you “independent”

In an English test, you must read and understand an unknown text and then write your own text about it when working on the assignments. As you probably do not know some words or phrases you read you start looking them up in a dictionary. This often takes quite a lot of time and sometimes you make mistakes, e.g. by choosing the wrong meaning. You might even have the impression that that have not completely understood various passages of the text. In such a situation intelligent guessing is an important and useful method to improve your reading skills.



Assignments: (You will find the solutions on pages 9-10)

- 1. In the same text you read before, some words which you probably do not know are underlined. Re-read the text again, guessing the meanings of these words from the context. Then fill in the table on the next page.**
- 2. Only use your dictionary if you absolutely fail to guess a meaning intelligently!**
- 3. Which ways are there to guess meaning intelligently?**

Earthquakes

Every year earthquakes are responsible for a large number of deaths and vast amounts of destruction in various parts of the world. Most of these damaging earthquakes occur either in a narrow belt which surrounds the Pacific Ocean or in a line which extends from Burma to the Alps in Europe. Some of the destruction is directly caused by the quake itself. An example of this is the collapse of buildings as a result of vibration. Other damage results from landslides, *tsunamis* (large ocean waves) or major fires which are initiated by the quake.

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Worksheet "Intelligent guessing":



Word	German meaning (your guess)	the way you guessed the word intelligently (e.g. context,...)
vast		
to extend from		
collapse (n.)		
to be initiated by		
magnitude (n.)		
to alleviate		
to facilitate		
accurate		
location		

IV Linking ideas – understanding a text with the help of connectives

A text can only be called “text” if the single sentences that it is made of are linked with each other in a way that the reader can understand the meaning they have altogether. Therefore every writer needs to create a *coherent* text in which each aspect is linked to other aspects. This coherence makes a text comprehensible for the reader and helps him to find his way through it.



A writer has to think carefully about how he wants to use language to guide his readers through a text. He uses particular words or phrases to relate each aspect of a text to other aspects or ideas which are called *linking words* or *connectives*. Thus, for example, linking words such as *first, second,...* introduce a new point. Simple words such as *this* or *these* to refer to aspects mentioned before and show the reader that particular aspects are maybe explained in some more detail.

Experienced readers recognize these linking words quickly and they help them in many ways, for example to get an overview of the text structure (line of argument) or to find more detailed information about topics treated in a text. The following exercise aims at training your skill to detect connectives and to get an insight into the line of argument of a writer. When you write your own texts, make sure that you use linking words efficiently to present a well-structured and logically ordered text.

Assignment:

Read through the first two paragraphs of the text about earthquakes once again, marking all the words/phrases that are used to link ideas, i.e. to refer to aspects mentioned before or after a statement/sentence. Then fill in the table below. One example is already given.

You will find the solutions on pages 9-10.

Fill in the table:

linking word or phrase (+lines)	refers to.... (+lines)
these (damaging earthquakes) (l. 2)	earthquakes (l. 1)

V "Skimming" – getting the "gist" of a text

A typical assignment in a class test aims at summarizing the main information of a text on a given topic. In this part you will learn how you can quickly find out about how a text is structured and thus which information it contains. The reading strategy you should use first is called *skimming*. When you skim a text you do not look for particular keywords or any particular information. Your aim is to get the gist, the main idea, of the text. In German *skimming* means "überfliegendes Lesen".



When you want to get such an overview of a text and its information, it is useful to read the so-called topic sentences first. These are sentences a writer mostly uses in the beginning, but sometimes also at the end of a paragraph. As the term indicates, they contain the "gist", the topic, of a paragraph, sometimes they even sum up what it is about. They contain keywords that occur again in the following lines. For example, the sentence "Some of London's most famous attractions can be found along the River Thames." tells you that the following paragraph will be about particular attractions in a certain area of London. Thus, you roughly know its topic without reading the whole paragraph if the assignment does not require close reading.

Assignment:

- 1. Quickly skim the text and take notes on the different aspects of Iceland it deals with.**
Time: just 5 minutes!
- 2. Check with the solutions on page 10.**
- 3. Summarize the main information about Iceland.**
Write your own text!

"Iceland" by Stephen Fox

Of all the countries in the frozen north, Iceland may be the most surprising. It is divided into distinct regions, each region with its own particular terrain and life style, and all the regions are amazing.

The northern part of the island is truly the cold and frozen part, piled with snow and ice in the winter. People in a few small villages fish or farm all summer to store up food against the long, cold winter ahead. As if those conditions were not harsh enough, the area also has active volcanoes that have been known to destroy entire villages.

The middle of the island is equally forbidding, but almost no one lives there. A flat treeless area splits the middle of the area from north to south. This is where the two continental plates of the Atlantic meet and here the island is gradually growing as more land is being created by the rolling back of the two plates away from each other. This region looks as barren as a landscape on the moon.

In the south is the capital city of Reykjavik. Life here is completely different from the rest of the island. The warm Gulf Stream touches only this southern part of the island, keeping the climate of the city surprisingly moderate. In fact, temperatures in Reyjavik in the winter are actually higher than they are at the same time in New York City or Boston. Also, the city, although it has only 100,000 people bustles with cultural events such as opera and art exhibits and offers its citizens all the latest fashions from all over the world, as well as excellent restaurants (some of which still have whale on the menu despite a world-wide ban on the killing of whales) movie theaters with the latest films.

Reykjavik also boasts five huge outdoor swimming pools that stay open all year long, even in the worst winter weather. How can that happen?

Well, Icelanders have learned to make use of all the volcanic activity that created their island in the first place and still rumbles underneath their land to this day.

They have put pipes down to all that underground heat and now use it for all sorts of things. All the homes in Reykjavik are heated by water run through the hot rocks below the soil - and so are the swimming pools! Even in the dead of winter, the pools are warm and pleasant. You can swim and watch the snow coming down - it melts as soon as it touches the warm fog about three feet above the pool. It never reaches the swimmers!

That same underground heat is used to run enormous greenhouses that grow everything from bananas to coffee in the frozen middle section of the island. And when the geothermal energy isn't enough, that same middle area provides hydroelectric power from its wild, rampaging waterfalls.

The people in the isolated north also benefit from the wealth and technology of the capital city, because they are kept in contact with the world by television broadcasts. And, although there are no hospitals in the north, people with medical emergencies can be brought out by helicopters flying quickly from Reykjavik.

Of course, there is one other section of Iceland, a brand new, tiny island created by a volcano right off the coast in the late 1950'. No one can survive on its rocky, lava surface as yet.

Still, some people may pioneer there someday soon. After all, some citizens have recently colonized the harsh middle ground of the main island and are trying to mine there! Icelanders love everything about their unusual land.

Key to the exercises:

II:

1. They occur either in a narrow belt which surrounds the Pacific Ocean or in a line which extends from Birma to the Alps in Europe.
2. An earthquake can cause collapse of buildings, landslides, tsunamis or major fires.
3. There are about one million earthquakes a year.
4. This instrument is called the Richter Scale.
5. The causes of earthquakes can be the ruptures or breaks of rocks at or below the earth's surface.
6. They use special instruments, such as seismographs or tilt meters.

The way you can quickly retrieve this information from the text is by just searching for keywords from the questions (e.g. "occur", "cause", etc.). It is not necessary to read the whole text, just the sentence or sentences that contain the keywords.

III:

word	German meaning (your guess)
vast	weit
to extend from... to	sich ausdehnen von....bis
collapse (n.)	der Zusammenbruch
to be initiated by	ausgelöst werden von
magnitude (n.)	die Größe, Schwere
to alleviate	Lindern
to facilitate	etw. erleichtern
accurate	genau, präzise
location (n.)	der Ort

You will find more information on how you can guess meaning intelligently on the next page!

How can you guess meaning intelligently?

1. You can think about words from other languages (German, Latin, French,...) that are or look similar to the word you look for.
2. You may use the context in which the word is used (the meaning of the sentence it is used in, the meaning of other words "around" it,....)
3. Maybe you know words from the same word family – if you want to guess intelligently the meaning of a noun, maybe you already know the adjective or the verb from the same family....

IV:

linking word or phrase (+lines)	refers to.... (+lines)
these (damaging earthquakes) (l. 2)	earthquakes (l. 1)
some of (the destruction) (l. 4)	damaging (earthquakes) (l. 2)
an example of this (l. 5)	destruction (l. 4)
other damage (l. 6)	destruction (l. 4)
However (l. 8)	a million quakes: contrast!
exceptions to this (l. 11)	quakes causing major damage (ll. 10-11)
This (l.14)	the rupturing or breaking of rocks (l. 13)
The former(l. 20)	seismographs (l. 19)
The latter (l. 22)	tiltmeters (l. 19)

V:

The text deals with the following aspects of Iceland which are in the topic sentences:




- the northern part of the island
- the middle
- the south
- the capital Reykjavik and its particularities
- the use of volcanic activity in the south
- how the people in the north benefit from volcanic activity
- a tiny volcano island right off the coast

By reading the topic sentences, you will soon have noticed that the text deals with the different regions of Iceland and later focuses on some particularities of Iceland – such as volcanic activity and a small, lonely island off its coast. The only paragraph which requires a closer look is the fourth one. It does not precisely deal with the town of Reykjavik but with the use of volcanic activity in the city itself. Thus, if you feel the first sentence does not give you enough insight into the content of a

paragraph, scan the rest of this part to look for more revealing keywords (such as volcanic activity or heat).

Portfolio

Date: _____

				My own remarks
I am able to <i>scan</i> a text in order to find particular information quickly and precisely.				
I can guess unknown words intelligently, e.g. with the help of context.				
I can recognize and understand the structure of an unknown text by recognizing how ideas are linked.				
I can use <i>skimming</i> in order to find out about the gist of a text. This means I can identify topic sentences.				
Reading strategies help me to gain more confidence for my own text production.				
The reading strategies I learned enable me to read more quickly and to understand unknown texts better.				
I am interested in learning more about reading strategies.				