

Becoming a Strategic Learner

Reading strategies

Reading is a skill and, like any skill, can be improved. We can, quite simply, become better readers if we know *why* we are reading a text and use the reading strategy that is most appropriate to the task. For example, we often *skim* an article to find out what the main idea of the article is. If, for example, you are doing research on an American president, you would have to quickly evaluate which of many articles you can use and which you will not use by quickly skimming the articles to see if they contain good information.

Scanning is a type of reading we use when we are looking for specific information. If you need to find out which American presidents were killed in office, you would quickly scan the articles until you found the words *killed* or *assassinated* and then choose those articles to work with. In fact, we scan written material several times daily without knowing it. Let's say you want to see a film. You would quickly scan the titles of all the films in the newspaper to see where the film you want to see is playing and at what time.

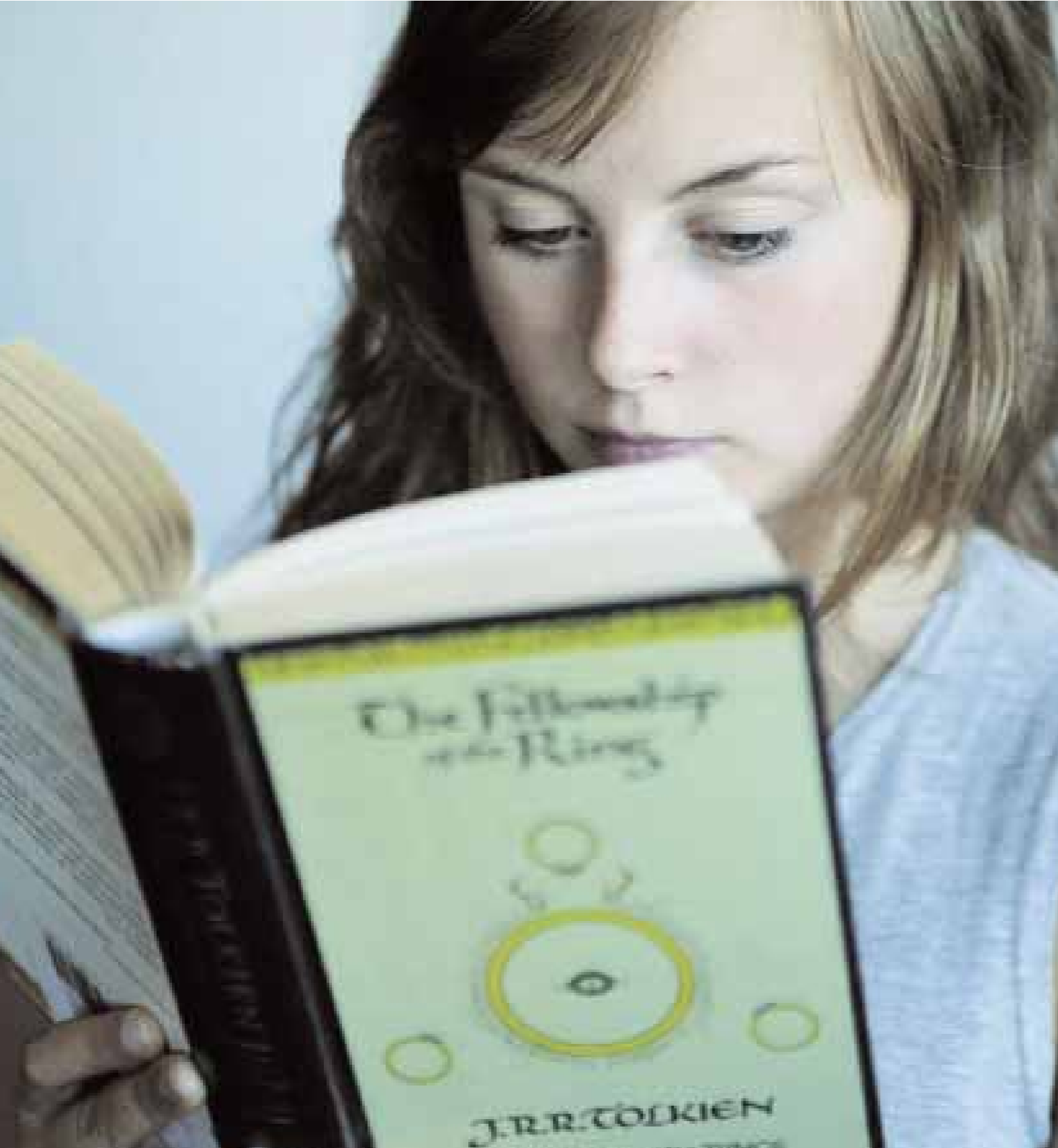
Yet another way of reading is *close reading* which you use, especially at school, in order to understand a text fully. And finally, many of us *read extensively*, as when we read a novel just for the fun of it.

Let us check first of all that you know the differences between these reading techniques. In the following cases, what would you do – skim, scan or read closely?

- 1 You are reading a text of about 500 words on schools in America. Next week you will be tested on it.
- 2 A friend has sent you an article from a newspaper about a wrestling match. You want to find out whether your friend Joachim has won, who came in second place, and what the scores were.
- 3 You need to find an example of a positive and a negative book review for your English class. You go to the Internet to see what is available.

In your English course you will spend a lot of time reading closely, so we will start there.





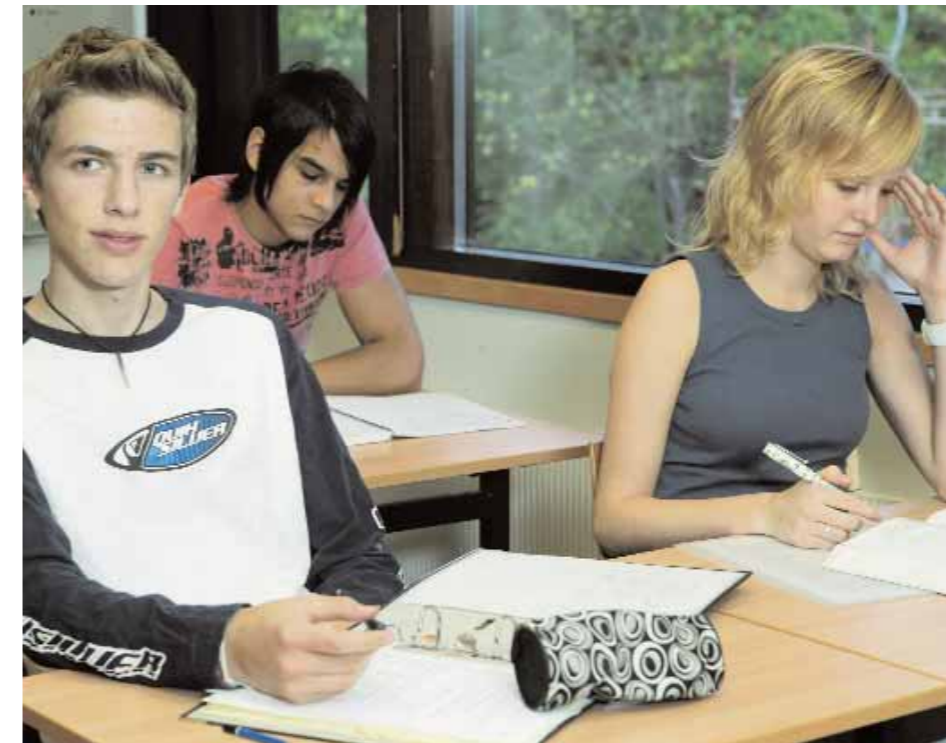
Before you get started

Reading strategies begin before you start reading a text. What does the *title* of the article, short story or text tell you about what you are going to read? What do you already know about the subject? If this is a factual text perhaps it would be a good idea to draw a mind map of any associations the title gives you. Use what you already know about the subject. Even the title of a work of fiction can get you started thinking about the contents of the story.

Now look at *illustrations*. They are certainly a strong hint at what the text is going to be about. Are there any *pre-reading exercises*? What do these tell you about the text you are going to read?

Close reading: finding out what new words mean

Sometimes, when we open a textbook and look at a new text, we feel like giving up. There are so many new words! But don't worry. There are many strategies we can use which will help us to understand them. And there are dictionaries too.



Take a look at the following sentence where a word is missing.

Human beings have two Cats and dogs have four.

We already know all the words which are printed here. And we have all seen cats and dogs, not to mention other human beings. So which word is missing? Unless we look at the sentence that comes afterwards we could very well guess the words, *arms*, *eyes*, *elbows* and so on. The sentence that comes afterwards limits our choices so that we guess the word *legs*. We understand the information because of the *context* in which it appears.

Now take a look at the following sentences in which one word has been written in Spanish. Can you guess the meaning of the Spanish word from the context in which it appears?

- 1 When we eat dinner we usually use a knife and **tenedor**.
- 2 My dog doesn't like cats and **ladra** so loudly when he sees one that they run away.
- 3 The day was so **hermoso**; it was warm, the sky was blue and the sun shone brightly.
- 4 My sister is so **lista**; she gets a 6 in all her subjects at school.
- 5 Call the **fontanero**! There is a leak in the bathroom.

Now look at the following words. Can you guess what they mean ?
assume, relish, indispensable, vacancy, vault

If we put these words in a context, you can use the other words in the sentence to find out what the new words mean.

- 1 Frank is not at school today, so we must *assume* he is sick.
- 2 You could see that he *relished* the meal. He ate and ate, with a smile on his face all the time.
- 3 A dictionary is *indispensable* when you need to look up a new word.
- 4 There's a *vacancy* for a sales clerk at the gas station. Why don't you try to get the job?
- 5 Banks keep gold in their *vaults*. It is safer there than in an office.

Use the same strategies with the texts you are going to read in this book. Using them will soon become a timesaving habit. And, of course, you can always check that you have found the right meanings by looking up the words in a dictionary.

Close reading: understanding how the parts of a text are connected

A written text usually consists of a number of sentences which are linked together. They are connected by means of words and phrases that help us to see the relationships between them and to understand the whole text. Take a look at these short texts:

- 1 **First**, heat some oil in a pan. **Then** fry the onions and garlic lightly. **When** they are soft, add the roast chicken. **Finally**, add the salt, pepper and herbs. **Then** enjoy your meal!
- 2 **Since** I did not speak Norwegian, I had to pay somebody to translate for me. **As** Norway is a high-cost country, it cost me a fortune. **Because** I could not afford to do this for long, I decided to learn the language.
- 3 It was raining heavily when I left home to walk to work. **So** I put on my raincoat and a pair of strong shoes. I **also** took my umbrella out of the closet. **Then** I set out to walk to the factory, **but** the rain was so heavy that I stopped a taxi. **After** the short journey, I arrived at work early, **so** I had time for a cup of coffee.

The linking words in the first text tell us about a **sequence**.

Those in the second text introduce **reasons** why things happen.

The linking words in the third text have a number of different functions. Look at each one and decide what its job is.

Now let us turn to skimming.

Skimming: finding the most important information in a text

When we skim a text we read it quickly, without thinking about every word. We look for those facts that are more important than others, and pass over details and examples.

Look for important nouns and verbs, and possibly dates and place names. Try to find the topic sentence of the paragraph. This is the sentence that states what the topic of the paragraph is and is often the first sentence in the paragraph.

Now skim this text quickly and then answer the questions afterwards.



At the time of the American Revolution (1775–1783) the United States was a nation of farmers. More than 95 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture. Today, only two percent of the American population works on farms. Even though this number may seem relatively small, the United States is still considered “the breadbasket of the world and one third of the crops produced in the United States are exported to other countries.

It is not as an agricultural nation, however, that most people see the United States, but as one of the world’s leading industrial nations. One historical reason for this was that natural resources were plentiful on the American continent, for example coal and iron by the Great Lakes and oil in the South. In addition, American manufacturers were quick to adopt the factory system which gathered many workers together in one place and this made industry more effective and the products cheaper.

The text deals with

- a the United Kingdom
- b the United States
- c North America

The main topic of the first paragraph is

- a new technology in the US
- b agriculture in the US
- c factory workers in the US

The main topic of the second paragraph is

- a why the US became a leading industrial nation
- b where coal can be found in the US
- c cheap manufactured goods

After skimming these two paragraphs, would you read the entire article if you were doing research on the geography of the United States? Explain your answer.

Reading extensively: reading for pleasure

The great thing about reading extensively – reading novels, for example – is that you can enjoy yourself and improve your English at the same time. Here is some advice.

- Choose the type of book you like reading in Norwegian – detective stories, historical novels, biographies, science fiction, adventure stories, or whatever.
- Use your dictionary only when you have to. If you look up every new word, it will spoil your enjoyment of the literature. Only look up words which occur often and which you need to know in order to follow the story.

Listening strategies

Listening to a recording in class

Listening to a recording in class is different from listening to people speaking to you outside school. In “real life” situations, you can ask people to repeat and explain themselves, or to speak slowly, and you can use their body language and facial expressions to help you understand what they are saying.

But in a classroom setting you can’t ask a voice on a CD or a sound file to slow down or use different words, so here is some advice on how you can get the most out of listening to an English text in the classroom.

Before you listen:

- Use the same strategies you used for reading. Look at the title, illustrations if there are any and the introduction. What do you already know about the topic?
- Make sure you know what is expected of you after having listened to the text. Are you expected to answer comprehension questions afterwards, for example? If the questions are printed in the book, look them over and make sure you understand them.

While you listen:

- Listen carefully for words which you may confuse with others: there are important differences between *did* and *didn’t*, *can* and *can’t*, *is* and *was*, *will* and *would*, *his* and *hers*, for example.
- Listen for words which are stressed as these will normally give you the most important information. Stressed words are those which stand out in speech. They do this because they carry more important meaning than others. In the following sentences,



the words *in italics* are stressed. Do you know why?

- I asked for a *red* sweater, not a *green* one.
- I *never* told her that.
- Pay attention to the speaker's tone of voice. Is he or she expressing surprise, doubt, or anger, for example? Is he or she asking a question or making a statement?
- Listen carefully for linking words, since they will help you to guess what is coming.
 - If you hear *but* or *however*, you can expect some sort of contrast.
 - Numbers are great clues. If you hear *There are three things...*, listen for all three things. Words like *firstly*, *secondly* and *thirdly* will also tell you how many things are being talked about.
- Make short notes while you listen.
 - Note the most important facts only.
 - Use key words and phrases, not complete sentences.
 - Write each important idea on a separate line, and leave lots of space so that you can write more later.

Now try to use some of these techniques when you listen to texts in this textbook.

