

Read Your Way to Success

i. **Problem:**

1. Whenever I asked both my tutees (ESL students) whether they are into the habit of reading, their answer was always a no.
2. It is difficult to place a finger on a canonical rule of thumb for the English Language. It is possessed of a diverse amalgamation of various, lesser rules, which are often subject to change when the circumstance calls for it. This unique complexity presents a stumbling block for students learning the language.
3. Too much homogeneity in scripts. This is a common syndrome among students when they draw on a vocabulary pool which is lacking in depth.
4. Although students are given writing assignments and activities to work on grammar, vocabulary, I feel that these mere exercises are insufficient if they are setting out to gain a firm grasp over the English language.
5. My 2 tutees are ESL students and they both have a proclivity to moor their expressions in English on the sentence structure rules of their native tongue. This method is often unfeasible, as the rules of expression characteristic of their native tongue are often at odds with that of the English Language and such a system frequently gives rise to grammatically confounding sentences.

These are very distressing matters for me, as ever since a tender age, my parents have instilled in us the importance of reading as a means for us to be proficient in the English Language. Having been brought up with such a mentality, I too believe that there is probably no other way for us to be in tune with English. Though I understand that it is tough to keep up with reading due to school work, I do feel an urgent need for us to be constantly in touch with reading materials, especially so for non-native speakers who are trying to master English.

ii. **Solution:**

I wish to design an activity to encourage tutees to adopt the habit of reading on a regular basis. I would like to design a “Reading Journal” where they can keep track of the books or articles they have read. The “Reading Journal” could be incorporated in tutoring sessions or the student could keep track of his or her reading and do all the updating themselves.

This activity should be carried out in a group setting or with a partner. I feel that in such a manner, student interest will be steepened as they will be able to relate to others their reading experiences, share their sentiments and engage in healthy discussions. Crucially, having review their journals each week, would allow them to take up reading consistently.

The Reading Journal should consist of the following:

1. **Book Summary-** where they will condense the essence of the book into a concise blurb. Additionally, they will be required to pen down thoughts about the books they have read.
 - ➔ This serves as a gauge which demonstrates the depth of their understanding of the text. The analysis and review component helps them build confidence in expressing themselves and empowers them to translate what is in their mind's eye onto paper.
2. **Vocabulary-** where they take notes of new words or phrases they come across. The vocabulary section of the reading journal may consist of several categories such as, describing feelings, transitions etc
 - ➔ Although students may not be able to remember all the words they have written down, this serves as a reference for them, should they find themselves stuck with limited vocabulary choice.

iii. Action Plan:

1. **Survey-** To suss out reading trends, especially students whose first language is not English. This would then allow me to better understand their reading habits and the kind of material which will kindle their interest (see survey results)
2. **Look into suitable books for ESL students-** There is a need to match books with students according to their varying degrees of linguistic proficiency i.e. the difficulty of books assigned must be commensurate to the student's standard of English. In oversight, we often neglect that the level of English proficiency differs from individual to individual. A struggling ESL student might be conferred a challenging book, hence defeating the purpose of reading, and serves to work against him ultimately. Similarly, giving a student a book whose difficulty is below par with the standard of his English will not be of much help towards improving his or her language capability and broadening his horizons.

iv. Research:

1. From Teaching Developmental Reading- Background Reading, by Susan Naomi Bernstein, she introduced "Reading Logs" or "Reflective reading journals".

In the book, it gave a very detailed study on the effectiveness of "Reading Logs".

The study was as follows:

"First -year college students received instructions in metacognitive awareness for reading and writing. Metacognition or thinking about thinking" involves the awareness and regulation of thinking processes. Metacognition strategies are those strategies that require students to think

about their own thinking as they engage in academic tasks. Within this study, students were taught specific metacognitive strategies for both reading and writing as part of a six week residential summer program. Students' use of reflective reading journal or reading logs was integral to the strategy instruction. The students used the reading log to reflect on their own thinking processes as they engaged in reading and writing tasks. Reading log entries were requested from students as they completed their reading assignments for each week. Entries range in length from two to five pages. Each student generated six reading log entries which were photocopied for analysis" (80).

Reading Log Results:

"Within the class, the use of the reading log entries, students were required to stop, slow down, and actively think about what they were reading as opposed to simply reading text from start to finish. This slowing down proved to be beneficial to their developing awareness of reading and writing processes.

Excerpts from the reading logs also provide evidence of students' critical engagement with text. Sample excerpts illustrate students' reflection on past experience and prior knowledge to make sense of their reading. This notion is supported by the transactional view of reading which posits that meaning resides within the transaction between reader and text instead of the text alone. This view of reading promotes the idea that students move beyond literal recall of text and into the realm of higher order thinking as they react to what they read.

The reading logs provided a forum for students to articulate their metacognitive processes while engaging in both reading and writing tasks. Journals, therefore, can be justified as a tool to promote metacognitive awareness on the part of college learners. Use of such journals can also assist students with realizing the connection between their roles as critical readers and their roles as critical writers" (89)

2. I realized that my tutee often makes the same mistakes regarding the usage of nouns, he often omits the 's' at the end of a word when he writes in plural form.

From the Houston Mifflin handout given to us, I was able to better understand the fundamental and functional difference between the English Language and the native tongue of ESL students. Through this handout, I was able to empathize with and understand the reason for which my tutee did not understand plural form nouns despite my countless explanations. In Mandarin, "*nouns do not have plural forms*"

Thus, I feel that if my tutees pick up reading on a consistent basis, they would be more comfortable with nouns in plural form. With more exposure, they would be more exposed to the proper uses of nouns.

3. Lastly, matching a suitable book to my tutees level of English proficiency is the most crucial aspect of my project.
As such, I have looked into suitable books for different levels of English.

I found a De Anza College instructor, Gretchen Himes, who categorizes books for ESL students on her webpage.

Instructor Recommended Books:

[http://faculty.deanza.edu/himesgretchen/stories/storyReader\\$24](http://faculty.deanza.edu/himesgretchen/stories/storyReader$24)

I believe the student's instructor would be the best resource for a student to turn to should they need advice for book recommendation. The student's instructor would understand the student's level of English best and thus would be the best candidate to suggest a book for them.

v. Further Suggestions:

Besides reading, I would suggest for students to tune in to the daily news, as this would help with their listening and also, through listening people speak, they would be able to learn of words are being pronounced. This I believe is crucial for students in ESL 234 to 251.

Furthermore, it was also suggested in the book, *Teaching Developmental Reading- Historical, Theoretical, and Practical Background Reading for students to watch subtitled foreign films.*

The rationale for this activity was to:

- 1) Find motivation to read
- 2) Experience a high level of time on task
- 3) Read faster to keep up with the script
- 4) Improve comprehension by reading and watching
- 5) Learn vocabulary in context
- 6) Discover different cultures while building background for additional reading
- 7) View classic works by famous directors
- 8) Build confidence by successfully reading adult material
- 9) Integrate language by reading, writing, speaking and listening
- 10) Actually enjoy reading

Furthermore, in response to this activity, a student said, "I wasn't even aware that I was reading" (397)

I strongly feel that incorporating a movie component into learning English would definitely make the learning process more enjoyable, as this breaks the monotony of reading only books.

vi. How I wish to incorporate Reading Journals into my tutoring sessions:

1. **When I first meet my tutee, I would introduce him or her to this activity and encourage her to read**

2. If he or she is receptive to this idea, I would suggest for us to do a close reading of the book together and start off with a short book to build his or her confidence
3. Show him or her a list of suggested books
4. Suggest for him or her to read at least 1 chapter of the book a week
5. Each week, I would do a close reading of the what he or she has read and answer the questions he or she might have pertaining to grammar usage or vocabulary
6. I would review his or her reading journal every week for at least 10 minutes toward the end of our session
7. Occasionally, if my tutee requires help with pronunciation, I would ask him or her to read the book aloud during our tutoring sessions
8. I could also recommend my tutee foreign film, as suggested in "Teaching Developmental Reading" and for this case, I would ask him or her to do a film review instead of a book review

Conclusion

Reading is widely considered a panacea for all problems associated with language inproficiency. It is an effective method which helps language newbies become more language savvy and bolsters them, at least, onto the initial rungs of the proficiency ladder, from which they are able to progress independently.

That said, receptivity to reading presents a major obstacle. Due to sheer unfamiliarity of the language, many are often unwilling to pick up a book to read. Moreover, many are already treading for dear life in a sea of school work and reading is the last thing on their minds.

However, these individuals must be made to realize the far-reaching benefits which can be derived through reading, as well as the paramount role it can play in helping them develop language competency. This is the reason why my project revolves around debunking the perennial myth that reading is a chore. Through this program, I truly hope that students will discover the true joys of reading, embrace the abounding benefits to be reaped and pursue reading with zeal and zest.

Bibliography

1. Bernstein, Susan Naomi Teaching Developmental Reading- Background Reading. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003
2. Boylan, Hunter and Stahl, Norman A. Teaching Developmental Reading- Historical Theoretical and Practical Background Readings. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003

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4. Houston Mifflin. ESL Tip Sheet 2: The Chinese Languages. Handout

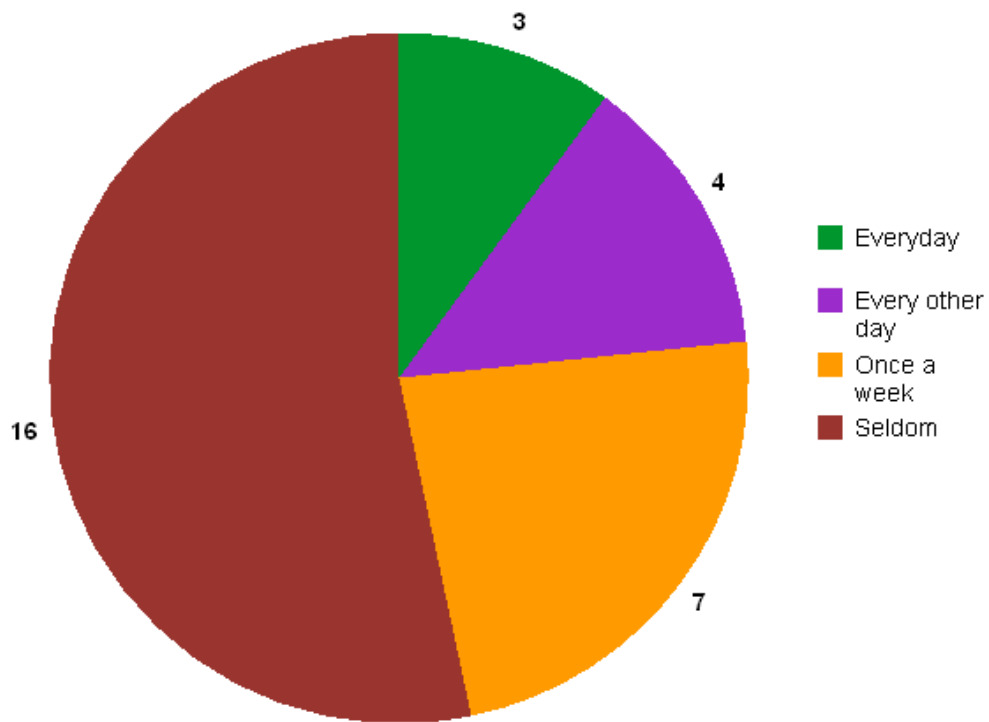
Reading Survey:

1. How often do you read?
 - a. Everyday

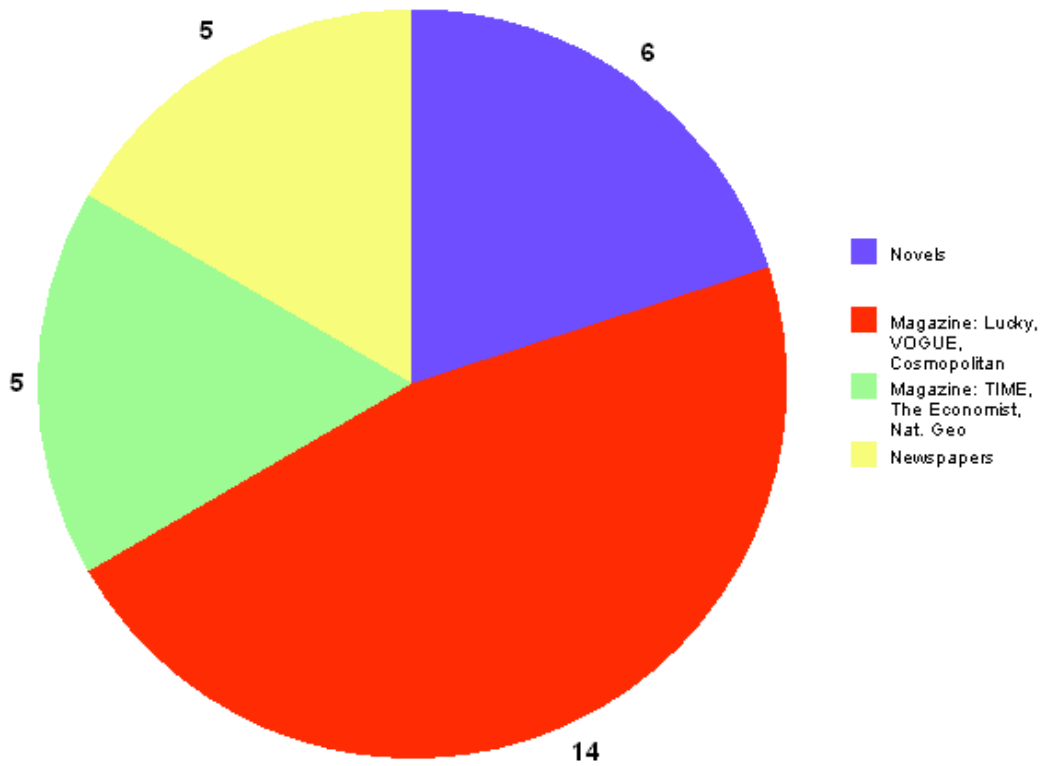
- b. Every other day
 - c. Once a week
 - d. Seldom
2. What kind of reading materials do you read?
- a. Novels
 - b. Magazines: Lucky, VOGUE, Cosmopolitan
 - c. Magazines: Newsweek, TIME, National Geographic
 - d. Newspapers
3. Do you think reading is important?
- a. Yes
 - b. No.
 - c. Maybe
4. Has reading been an aid to your writing?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

Results (From a random sample of 30 international students at De Anza College)

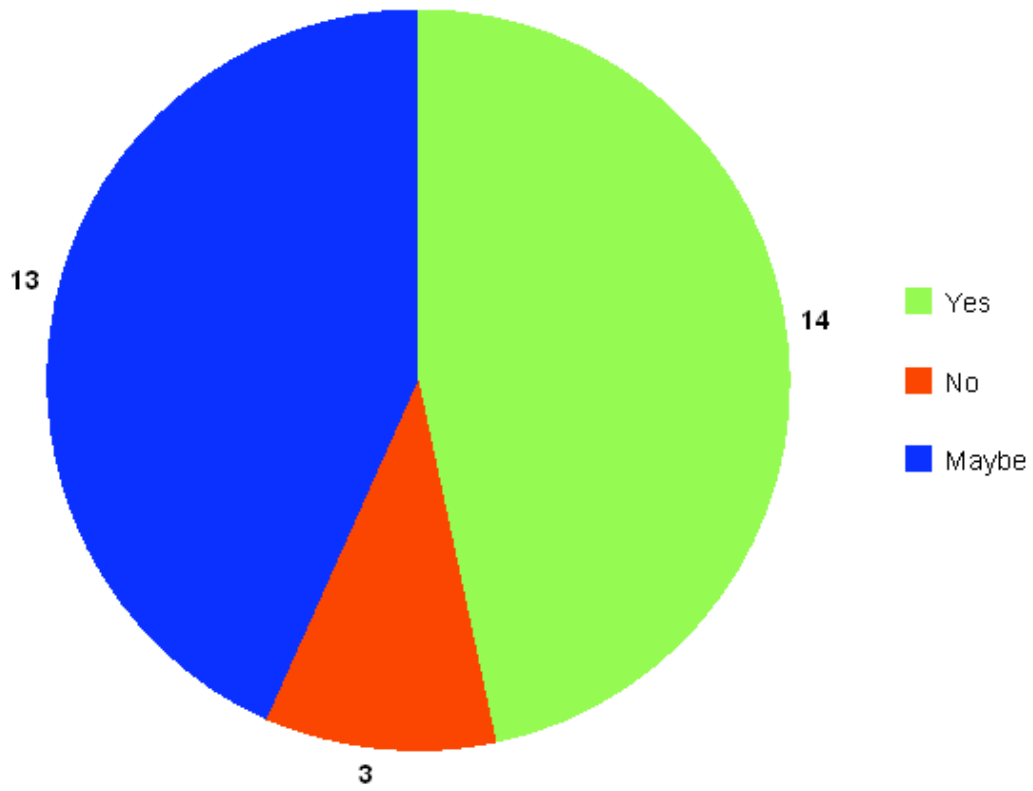
Q1. How often do you read?



Q2. What kind of material do you read?



Q3. Do you think reading is important



Q4. Has reading aided your writing

