

YOU GOTTA DO LIGHT READING!

“First people read to you, then they read with you, and finally they give up because you have taken control of your own reading.”

—*Reading FAQ* by Frank Smith

This is where we want our students to get in our language classes—reading independently because they want to, but these types of reading are not exclusive to any one level:

- We read *to them* with **kindergarten reading** (and metaphorically by storytelling).
- We read *with them* by shared reading, or **academic reading** (books that are bit too hard for them to read on their own; books that may be part of the mandated curriculum)
- They read *on their own* with **light reading** or free reading. Light reading is the preferred method of reading and is the foundation for advanced vocabulary and grammar development.

We do all of the above strategies regularly with all students in all our language classes, with the end in mind that our students will get the most out of reading for pleasure on their own.

Build light reading time into your weekly schedule. Make it a priority. Start from the first week. Drill the procedures for getting a book, reading a book and putting books away right from the start. Provide students with good books and time to read them. Allow students to take books home

I. WHY DO LIGHT READING?

(from the introduction to the Light Reading Book Reports: <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/LIGHT-READING-BOOK-REPORTS3.pdf>)

The books you will be reading for this part of this course are considered light reading. They are different than the heavier, academic reading that you will also do for this class. For what we consider academic reading, you will probably need the expert help of your instructor to fully understand the text; you can do light reading on your own. For this assignment you pick a novel that you want to read. You will receive a *Light Reading Book Report* before you read so that you can have a focus for your reading as you make your way through the book. Each of these reports will give you a specific purpose for your reading.

We are doing this type of reading, light reading, not only because it is easier and more enjoyable, but because students learn more language from it. According to research in language acquisition over the last 30 years, students learn more useful language from free reading than from traditional structured vocabulary and grammar lessons. Here are some quotes by leading researchers in reading and language acquisition that support this idea:

“Less frequent words... may best be learned by reading extensively, because there is just not enough time to learn them all through conscious study.” —Norbert Schmitt, Vocabulary in Language Teaching

“The only significant predictor of the ability to use the subjunctive was the amount of free voluntary reading done in Spanish; the amount of formal study of Spanish, the amount of formal study specifically aimed at the subjunctive, and how long subjects had lived in a Spanish-speaking country were not significant predictors of subjunctive competence.”

—Stephen Krashen, The Power of Reading

The best way to improve in a foreign language is to do a great deal of comprehensible, interesting reading. The case for self-selected reading for pleasure is overwhelming.

—Beniko Mason, Extensive Reading in English as a Foreign Language

Additional quotes supporting self-selected or light reading are found at the bottom of each Light Reading Book Report to help remind students why we are doing this.

II. WHY READ NOVELS?

We should not force our students to read only fiction during their foreign language experience, but novels are often some of the only lengthy materials available to lower level readers and there are tremendous advantages to reading fiction.

“I don’t know how one develops imagination without reading fiction” —Diane Ravitch

Reading novels is advantageous to students both as language learners and as well-rounded human beings:

1. **Readers learn more vocabulary from novels.** In a novel the vocabulary repeats itself more than that in non-fiction texts because the setting and the situations tend to be revisited and referred to over and over. This helps a reader to pick up both high frequency vocabulary as well as the specific words used in the novel and to become a better reader. Repeated vocabulary becomes automatic.

2. **Reading novels is easier and more fun than reading other materials.** Stories lend themselves to prediction. When you understand a story you spontaneously start to guess where it is going. This natural

interaction with the text makes reading fiction easier and more pleasant than nonfiction for young readers and for language learners.

3. **The life lessons in novels are easier to see than those in non-fiction texts.** The valuable lessons in nonfiction can be harder to spot as the reader wades through a sea of random real-life events. The focus on the story in a novel can help readers to understand the author's message more clearly. We do not have enough time to wade through non-fiction in order to discover the lessons that fiction can easily and pleasurably deliver to us.

4. **Novels help readers to develop empathy.** In a novel we are allowed to peek inside the heads of others and explore their motivations. Novels help us to develop perspective or Theory of Mind, which is the ability to understand another's thinking rather than just our own. In our connected, but isolated digital age we all need help with empathy. Reading novels that we enjoy and can understand is a good way to do that.

5. **Reading fiction makes you smarter.** "Those who read more fiction know more about a variety of subjects." (<http://www.schoolsmatter.info/2012/05/those-who-read-more-fiction-know-more.html>)

III. WHY LIGHT READING WORKS

A. Deliberate Practice: When students are reading for meaning they are practicing understanding the TL deliberately. Intensive practice does not always FEEL intense. It is often indistinguishable in feeling from lousy practice. Intensive practice is not the same as trying harder. It is reaching, recognizing and correcting.

- Reach
- Recognition of failure
- Correction

These three steps happen quickly, almost intuitively, as we read for pleasure and meaning. Students can see an unknown word, guess at the meaning, find out it does not fit and guess again in a twinkling.

B. Stretching: Self-selected reading gives students control and this sense of control permits them to read at the edge their ability with less anxiety. They are willing to take more risks because they choose what they are reading. They are willing to struggle a bit more; reaching, recognizing and discovering meaning as they read. Operating at the edge of their ability. When we struggle a bit we get smarter. They are, in essence, practicing intensively.

C. Focusing: We want students to actually concentrate and engage with reading materials. Lean in. Recognize and experience the mistakes.

D. Engagement: No passivity. It is not just the time that builds memory, but the focus and the emotion connected with a task.

E. Repetition: To make a permanent memory you need to repeat it over and over.

F. Persistence: How do we get them to persist? We give them choice. Students don't mind struggling if they get to choose. Choice makes practice less of a chore.

"Talent is practice and practice is talent."

IV. QUALITY PRACTICE

Light reading provides quality practice in the language, the kind of practice that students will engage in because it is fun. Principles explained in *The Talent Code*, by Daniel Coyle apply to what we are trying to accomplish in our language classes and light reading offers the quality practice that Coyle describes:

How do kids learn quickly and well? Quality Practice (or Deep Practice).

How do they get quality practice? By enjoyable, light, almost subconscious **struggle** and **focus**.

With light reading this does not mean that the reading is hard for them. They are not struggling to understand the individual words, but they are focusing and trying to get the story. It takes focus, but it is not a chore. Ideally they should understand 95% of the words on each page. A typical small graded reader has just over 100 words per page, so have students open potential books up to a random page and scan to see how many words they do not understand. If it is more than 6 or so, maybe they should pick another book.

A. **Creating the Conditions for Quality Practice**

But how do we keep students struggling and focusing in language class?

Watch a bunch of kids riding bikes or skateboards. Look at the quality practice they are getting. There is choice, modeling and struggle. They are sometimes slightly off balance, there is lots of feedback, and there is plenty of additional information, but above all there is lots of practice. Let's analyze these elements in light of our free reading programs:

1) **Choice**—students get to pick what they want to read

2) **Modeling**

A) Teacher models asking questions about the text with comments and self-talk:

"I wonder why..."

"I wonder if..."

"Is it normal for a girl to...?"

- B) Teacher models by sitting and reading in front of the class
- 3) **Struggle**—it is OK not to understand *everything*, they just have to understand *most* things. Some students tend to tense up and think that they do not get it if there are just a few unknown words in the text.
 - 4) **Slightly off balance**—like learning to ride a bike or a skateboard, not constantly crashing, but the occasional crash is OK, to be expected and even preferred.
 - 5) **Lots of feedback**—observing and experiencing your own understanding and behavior. How do you know if you are doing it right? By evaluating your own behavior and results. With reading it comes by making predictions about the text. How do you know if you are really getting it? By putting the pieces together.
 - 6) **Information**—From teachers and peers. This gives context. Lots of back and forth, discussion, banter, talking about it
 - 7) **Lots of repetitions**—this is not a “one and done” deal. Students need to read. A lot.

B. ***Futbol de Sala* in Our Classrooms**

With light reading students accomplish more in less time because they are getting **quality time** with the language. Light reading builds fast, accurate responses in the TL. Like the *futbol de sala* phenomenon in Brazil, certain types of practice get students there. In *The Talent Code*, Daniel Coyle describes the effects of playing *futbol de sala*, which is soccer played indoors with a small ball. It is high speed, highly focused, and gives players many more touches per game. It is the secret of Brazil’s dominance in the soccer world.

We want to design our classes so that our students get the same type of practice as Brazilian street kids do in *futbol de sala* scrimmages: quick, focused language with plenty of “touches” each classes period—plenty of opportunities to engage with the language—either by responding to oral language or by reading.

C. **Struggle**

When students self-select their reading they tend to operate on the very edge of their ability and make mistakes, but correct them with exposure as they struggle with the text. A good story gives both the input and the motivation to do this.

Struggle in this sense is not consciously difficult. It is not like trying to read *La Celestina* or *Don Quixote* in your Spanish literature classes in college where a typical student has to look up scores of words on every page—that type of reading is WAY over the head of most students and does not help to build proficiency in the language.

Struggle is good. Struggle is not optional. Not flailing. Not totally over their head, but at the edge. This is $i + 1$.

The more they struggle and focus, the faster their speed and accuracy become. With each successful understanding of a skill or word, myelin gets another wrap around the new neuron. Each wrap insulates the neuron a bit more and allows the understanding to travel a bit faster. A neuron that is fully wrapped in myelin is 3,000 times as fast as a newly grown nerve fiber (p. 41, *The Talent Code*).

With Quality Practice, or Deep Practice, students can accomplish more in less time. Learning speeds up. They are making mistakes, feeling mistakes and fixing mistakes. They are in the constructive zone, on the edge of their ability and focusing on the target.

D. Picking a Book and Reading It

Here is how I describe the reading process of how to pick a book and how to read. This is done over and over throughout the school year. To pick a book I say:

Pick something *INTERESTING & COMPREHENSIBLE*.

You should *enjoy* it and it should be relatively *easy* for you to read.

It does not have to be utterly fascinating, and you do not have to understand every single word.

It just has to *hold your interest* for a while, and it has to be something that you can *mostly understand*.

If you find you don't like it or it doesn't make sense to you, choose something else to read next time.

You can *read the same thing again* if you want. That is a good option too."

Notice that "interesting and comprehensible" is repeated six different ways in these directions. We need to say things like this over and over throughout the school year to re-train our students to read for pleasure because schools all too often beat the concept of reading for pleasure out of them.

(A poster of this quote on page 11 of this handout and at <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/free-stuff>)

E. Stories Plus Light Reading Builds Deep Practice

In *The Talent Code*, Daniel Quoye says, "Vivid images are the languages of skill." Oral class stories in the target language teach students to think in images, to see and feel a narrative vividly. Then free reading lets them practice using that image-making ability and leverage it into skill in the language.

F. The Result of Deep Practice

An example of this fast and accurate learning happened recently with several students in my Spanish I classes. We were reading *Patricia va a California* novel in class and the challenge assignment was to re-read a chapter or two at a time and then close the book and summarize the most important parts of the chapter. This is what a non-native true beginner with no previous classes wrote (All of the writing was done in class.): <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Patricia-va-a-CA->

[Student-Summary.pdf](#) This is not perfect Spanish, but it is very good for a student in after 6 months of class.

V. BOOK REPORTS

In a school setting we are expected to give students grades. The problem is that if we give the traditional type of assessments that ask for specific details we begin to sap the joy out of the task. Here are five levels of assessments for reading.

Types of Comprehension Reading Checking (*Free Voluntary Reading* by Stephen Krashen, p. 84)

1. **Nothing required**

Discussion and writing about what is read is optional
What have you been reading? Tell me about it.

2. **Required writing**

How the reading is relevant to the reader
Light Reading Book Reports
(This is the preferred method because it gives evidence of understanding and something to grade and is still relevant and enjoyable for the student.)

3. **Summary writing**

Summarize chapter—do not re-write it. Many students will have to be coached on this or they will simply re-write the entire chapter. Tell them to read a chapter, then close the book and think about the most important events in it. Then write about those things.

4. **Comprehension questions:** High level (gist)

5. **Comprehension questions:** Low level (details)

These are (embarrassingly) the types of questions that I always used to use.
Low level questions can be helpful as oral checks to see how students are doing.

See sample Light Reading Book Report Forms at:

<http://www.brycehedstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/LIGHT-READING-BOOK-REPORTS3.pdf>

VI. READING REQUIREMENTS FOR EACH LEVEL

In all classes most of our precious class time is devoted to oral language, but regular free reading is included every week. The reading schedule below allows the teacher to:

- A) model reading
- B) instill the habit of reading
- C) boost confidence in reading
- D) monitor student attitudes toward reading
- E) monitor student progress in reading

For light reading (or upper level self-selected reading in the summer) students can choose almost anything they want to read as long as it is comprehensible and interesting to them.

- 4 & AP**
- Light reading in class: 15-20 minutes, 2-3x/week
 - Shared academic novels in class: 3-4/school year
 - Kindergarten Reading in class: 1x/week (10-15 minutes)
 - Occasional short readings for assignments outside of class
 - Read self-selected novels outside of class (150-180 minutes/week)

See sample reading log at:

http://www.brycehedstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/READING_LOG-Spanish1.pdf

- Read at least two novels in Spanish during the summer—course requirement.
Write a short reaction in Spanish (2 pages) and be prepared to talk about the novel when you return.

- 3**
- Light reading in class: 15-30 minutes, 2-3x/week
 - Shared academic novels in class: 3-4/school year
 - Kindergarten Reading in class: 1x/week (10-15 minutes)
 - Occasional short readings for assignments outside of class
 - Read self-selected novels outside of class (90-120 minutes/week)

- 2**
- Light reading in class: 10-20 minutes, 2-3x/week
 - Shared novels in class: 3-4/school year
 - Kindergarten Reading in class: 1x/week (10-15 minutes)
 - Occasional short readings for assignments outside of class
 - Read self-selected novels outside of class (60-90 minutes/week)

- 1**
- Light reading in class: 5-15 minutes, 3x/week
 - Shared novels in class: 3x/school year. Each novel 2-3 weeks

- Kindergarten Reading in class: 1x/week (10-15 minutes)
- Occasional short readings for assignments outside of class
- No assigned reading of novels outside of class except for make up or remediation

VII. **ACADEMIC READING (Reading Novels Together in Class)**

Academic reading is not light reading, but teachers often use both kinds of reading in the same language program, so it is briefly addressed here—mainly to demonstrate the distinction between the two.

A. **Ideas to Make Academic Reading More Engaging**

Make sure they understand.

Lack of comprehension > disengagement > boredom > behavior problems

Start Slow

Start with help and then ease up

Mix it up. Use different techniques for each chapter.

Act out a chapter

Don't act out every chapter, just dramatic or action packed ones

Act first, then read.

Students read along as teacher (or audio recording) reads aloud.

B. **Listening Activities to Support Academic Reading**

- Teacher reads aloud in the target language as students follow along in the text. The teacher reads with drama and passion, or at least with heart—as reading to a beloved child at bedtime.

See Mem Fox, *Reading Magic* for great ideas on why and how to read.

Best Mem Fox idea for me is voice modulation: high/low, fast/slow, fast/slow & pause.

- No student read-alouds in the T.L. class—this may be the worst reading choice because C.I. is so limited. When a typical student reads aloud in the T.L. this is what you get:

Poor pronunciation

No passion

No drama

No appropriate pausing

Limited-to-no understanding by the reader and the listeners

In other words, when a fellow student reads aloud in the target language, reading becomes even more boring because it does not engage the students. Even the student that is reading aloud may understand little of what she is reading.

If your voice as a teacher is tired use an audio recording of a chapter—either yourself or a professional recording by a native speaker (CD/MP3). Slow down the rate of speech to 80% at first until students get accustomed to the different voice, then increase the rate of speech until it is back up to 100%.

MOTIVATIONAL READING QUOTES

We remember things best when they are organized with everything else we know, when they come with stories attached, rather than as isolated bits of information.

—Frank Smith, Reading FAQ

New words are learned with remarkable facility, especially in stories, when you are reading something that makes sense to you.

—Frank Smith, Reading FAQ

Picking up word meanings by reading is 10 times faster than intensive vocabulary instruction.

—Stephen Krashen

Teaching vocabulary lists is inefficient—the time is better spent reading alone.

—Stephen Krashen

People acquiring a second language have the best chance for success through reading.

—Stephen Krashen

Incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth.

—W.E. Nagy & P.A. Herdman Quoted in Extended Reading in the Foreign Language Classroom

There is overwhelming research showing that recreational reading in a second language is a powerful means of improving grammar, vocabulary, spelling and writing ability — and it is far more efficient and far more pleasant than traditional instruction.

— Stephen Krashen, PhD

Ultimately, the purpose of literature is to provide meaning in our lives.

—Jim Trelease

Literature is considered such an important medium – more than television, more than films, more than art or overhead projectors – because literature brings us closest to the human heart.

—Jim Trelease

TV language is not nearly as complex as book language.

—Stephen Krashen

Classroom posters of these quotes can be found at <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/free-stuff>
Print them out and put them up in your classroom to help students (and administrators) to understand why we are reading in school. Often simply shining your laser pointer at them will do the trick.

The following mini-poster is up in several spots in my classroom to remind students ↓

HOW TO CHOOSE A BOOK

Pick something **INTERESTING** & **COMPREHENSIBLE**. You should **enjoy** it and it should be relatively **easy** for you to read. It does not have to be utterly fascinating, and you do not have to understand every single word. It just has to **hold your interest** for a while, and it has to be something that you can **mostly understand**.

If you find you don't like it or it doesn't make sense to you, choose something else to read.

You can **read the same thing again** if you want. That is a good option too.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION & READING

- Time spent in reading for pleasure is more valuable for foreign language development than time spent in direct instruction, so if you really want to learn a new language quickly, thoroughly and fluently, **READ!**
- More than 70% of a literate person's vocabulary in her first language comes from reading. You can apply the same principle to your foreign language learning process. You can increase your foreign language vocabulary by reading. Ideally, reading material should be:
 - **Interesting** You have to enjoy what you are reading or you will not stick with it long enough for it to do you any good. Find material that is interesting to you and read it. Often.
 - **Comprehensible** You need to be able to understand most (but not necessarily all) of what you read:
95%+ is ideal, 90% may be OK, 80% may be OK with the help of a group, 70% is not enough—find something that is more appropriate for your current reading level.
 - **Culturally Authentic** Ideally, what you read should help you to understand the culture (history, art, customs, mannerisms, music, business practices, films, religion, literature, philosophy, sports, and/or geography) of the people groups that speak the language.
- **Narrow Input:** Comprehension and language acquisition increase when a person reads narrowly, because the reader sees the same words used over and over again. Narrow input (or narrow reading) can mean:
 - Reading a great deal on **one topic** (intensive reading), or
 - Reading several works by **one author** (extensive reading).

Basic Reading Strategies

Start Reading. Gaining vocabulary through reading is 10 times faster than studying word lists alone. If you want to increase the number of words you know, it is a better use of your time to read than to study and memorize.

Keep Reading. Each time you see a word used in context you acquire more of its correct meaning and usage. Through context you will learn what it means and its grammatical application. You will learn if the word is a noun, an adjective, a verb, etc.

How to Deal With an Unfamiliar Word as You Read:

Skip it. Just skip over the word and keep on reading. Any one word is probably not all that important. With fewer pauses you will read more and understand more. Remember that you are focusing on the overall meaning not necessarily on trying to get every single word. If the word seems to be essential to understanding the passage

Guess. Go ahead and just guess the meaning of the word. If your guess doesn't seem to fit...

Guess again. If you still cannot seem to make sense of the word, and it seems like you need to understand it to get the gist of the passage...

Look it up. Go ahead and look it up in the dictionary if you cannot get the meaning from context, but don't make a habit of looking up every single word you do not understand—in the long run it will actually slow down the language acquisition process because it will slow down your reading, interrupt the flow, muddle the context, and give you less total exposure to the language.

Sources:

Day, Richard and Bamford, Julian. 1998. *Extensive Reading in the Foreign Language Classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Krashen, Stephen. 2004. *The Power of Reading*. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited.
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