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# *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*

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| **Author:** | I.S.P. Nation (2009) | |
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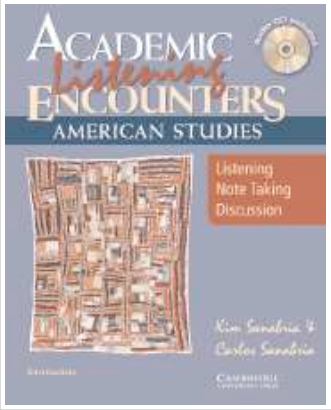


Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing is a text that can be used for English language teacher education programs and those ESL/EFL teachers interested in furthering their own professional learning. I piloted this book with two undergraduate Emirati teacher trainees in an undergraduate research course in the College of Education at Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This capstone course over a 20-week period requires undergraduates in their final year of a Bachelor in Education degree to design, implement and write up a research project. This review draws heavily on my—and my students'—evaluation of Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing as one of several resources for last term's course focus, teaching of writing in upper primary grades in private and government schools in the United Arab Emirates. The book's layout is user friendly, with clear headings and subheadings. The teacher trainees found the book accessible in terms of language and organization.

The book draws on current research and theories in applied linguistics and education, and its ten chapters provide an extensive range of useful teaching, learning and assessment techniques in the areas of reading and writing at all levels of English proficiency development. Nation offers a useful framework for teachers to draw on to design effective literacy programs for their students; his structure has four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development.

The sequence of each chapter follows a logical progression from learning to read in a first language and other language to text decoding, analysis and use. Chapter 1, "Learning to Read in Another Language", briefly addresses how individuals learn to read in their first language. It then describes several factors that affect how individuals learn to read in another language. Principles for Teaching Reading are also presented. Table 1.1

(p. 7) offers a simplified overview of L1/L2 Differences for an Individual Beginning to Read.

Chapter 2, "Learning to Recognize and Spell Words", covers learning letter shapes, the importance of phonemic awareness, the role of phonics, and learning to spell. The trainees found Table 2.4 (p. 23), Features of a Good Intensive Learning Programme, a particularly useful resource in their action research project because it serves as an evaluation tool for identifying affective, cognitive and social principles and their application.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer in-depth coverage of intensive and extensive reading. The author makes useful suggestions for teaching learners to read as opposed to practicing reading. Effective comprehension checking and text attack skills such as language analysis, inferencing, and prediction are suggested. Clear rationales for reading tasks are provided and essential elements are made explicit. The author reminds teachers that vocabulary, grammar and genre work together to achieve a text's communicative purpose. Chapter 4, "Extensive Reading", also offers a comprehensive overview of learning conditions and research and highlights key elements of effective extensive reading programs including text choice, text level and support for extensive reading programs. My student teachers reported that teacher leaders in their schools wanted more detail on how to go about setting up extensive reading programs. This is not the purpose of Nation's Chapter 4 and he appropriately refers those concerned with such implementation practicalities to Day and Bamford's (1998) book.

Reading speed is discussed in Chapter 5 with suggestions for increasing oral and silent reading speeds. Again, my student teachers reported that this chapter provided some excellent suggestions for increasing oral and silent reading speed. They were particularly appreciative of the paired and 4/3/2 reading (p. 67) activities because these cooperative learning strategies are not typical of the more traditional teacher-centred classes they tend to see in some of the local government schools. They also enjoyed trying the silent repeated reading (p. 69) themselves and planned to try "issue logs" (p. 69) in their own classrooms as a way of providing text choice and a means of further motivating their students.

Chapter 6 deals with the assessment of reading. Both formative and summative assessment techniques are presented with a good discussion of their strengths and potential pitfalls. Chapters 7 to 10 focus on the skill of writing. The macro and micro skills of writing are systematically addressed through meaningful writing task design, a focus on the writing process and the importance of feedback on writing. Specifically, Chapter 8, "The Writing Process", offers a logical staging of writing lesson activities from gathering and organizing ideas to drafting, reviewing, and editing. Again, Nation provides a clear and comprehensive table (Table 8.1, Using Questions to Assess the Writing Process, p. 126) for teachers to use as a reference when planning writing activities with their own classes. My student teachers commented that their learners needed to read, understand, and analyse models of the texts before they could be expected to produce writing collectively and then individually. They commented that the typical trend of many teachers in this region was to encourage their learners to "memorize texts to produce for the exams." As

such they suggested that teachers ensure their student writers' first understand models to counteract this trend.

Chapter 9, "Topic Types", is devoted to one way of analyzing nonfiction texts, by genre: labeling and analyzing texts according to their format, structure and linguistic features. This chapter was greatly appreciated by my student teachers and the language used to describe various genres/text types was accessible and meaningful to them.

The conclusion necessarily reminds the reader of the importance of balancing reading and writing activities in English language programs so that the four strands of meaning—focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development—build on and support each other.

Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 are useful resources for English language teachers and their students. Appendix 1 provides essential information on points of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation in the 1000 most frequent words of English. Appendix 2 is a list of conjunction relationships.

Nation's text is ambitious in that it claims to be a teacher resource for both beginning and experienced teachers. It was particularly useful as a resource for my undergraduate students, and I believe it offers much for an audience of trainee and developing teachers of English looking to enhance their own professional learning. However, it may not have the necessary depth required for master's and doctoral students. Whilst it provides a variety of effective strategies and useful guidelines for the English language teacher, the text would benefit from more explicit and current references to the theoretical underpinnings influencing Nation's choice of models and exemplars. For example, much has been written about the role of phonics in the teaching of reading and yet none of this is referenced in his section on page 14, The Role of Phonics in a Reading Programme. Specific references to current research on whole language approaches and reading in the content areas could also further strengthen this resource.

## Reference

Day, R. R. & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: CUP.

Lauren Stephenson
College of Education, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates
<lauren.stephenson@zu.ac.ae>

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