

Using authentic materials and approaches

For students to develop communicative competence in reading, classroom and homework reading activities must resemble real-life reading tasks. They must, therefore, be authentic in three ways.

1. The reading material must be authentic: It must be the kind of material that students will need and want to read while using the language in professional contexts.

When selecting texts for student assignments, remember that the difficulty of a reading text is less a function of the language, and more a function of the conceptual difficulty and the task(s) that students are expected to complete. Simplifying a text by changing the language often removes natural redundancy and makes the organization somewhat difficult for students to predict. This actually makes a text more difficult to read than if the original were used.

Rather than simplifying a text by changing its language, make it more approachable by eliciting students' existing knowledge in pre-reading discussion, reviewing new vocabulary before reading, and asking students to perform tasks that are within their competence, such as skimming to get the main idea or scanning for specific information, before they begin intensive reading.

2. The reading purpose must be authentic: Students must be reading for reasons that make sense and have relevance to them. 'Because the teacher assigned it' is not an authentic reason for reading a text.

To identify relevant reading purposes, ask students how they plan to use the language they are learning and what topics they are interested in.

3. The reading approach must be authentic: Students should read the text in a way that matches the reading purpose, the type of text, and the way people normally read. This means that the majority of reading should be done silently and reading aloud will take place only for pleasure.