



English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)
Module 3: Task 1 – 5 Video Lectures
Video 3.3: Reading Content in English

Welcome to this video on Reading Content in English. I'm Dawn Bikowski at Ohio University.

As an EMI instructor, you will want to be aware of the needs your students have regarding reading and understanding content in English. In order to make meaning from a text, students need to know most of the words, understand the grammar structures, and have at least some background knowledge about the topic. This video will discuss needs assessment for students' reading skills and the five subskills involved in reading.

Doing at least a brief needs assessment regarding students' reading proficiency is helpful. One way is to ask students to write a brief summary in their own words of an assigned text, either in or out of class, and in their native language or in English. Be sure you choose a text that is similar to readings you have for your class, in topic, vocabulary complexity, and grammatical complexity. Having students write a summary will give you an idea of the vocabulary they know and also if they are able to understand the main idea of a text. Another option is to give students a brief, ungraded quiz. Questions need to be written carefully, though, so that you focus on main ideas and not unnecessary details. And you'll have to decide if students can look at the reading when they answer the quiz or not. A third option is to have students read a text for homework and discuss it in small groups in class, asking each student to share at least 3 or 4 points. The benefit here is that students can communicate about main ideas, but at the same time, it might be unrealistic for the EMI instructor to hear all students in this format. All the same, these are some options in getting information about how well your students read and understand texts in English. And remember that students' reading comprehension in English may be stronger (or weaker) than their skills in listening or speaking in English.

What is reading anyway? Reading is a word that actually refers to several subskills. The main ones include these five:

- *Reading in detail.* This refers to a reader being able to figure out the main idea of a text and also any relevant details. The reader also needs to understand how the main idea and details work together to build meaning. For example, the reader needs to be able to identify how many main ideas a text has and how many details or examples the writer included. EMI students need to be able to read in detail and still focus on the main ideas so that they don't try to remember every small thing. They should remember the big main points and a few examples or details of those points. EMI students will need their instructor's help with this.



- *Scanning*. Scanning refers to being able to look quickly over a text and find specific information. For example, when you go to a restaurant and look for certain foods, like desserts or a fish dish, that is scanning. You don't read every word—instead, you search quickly for the section you want. And then you read more carefully. With EMI courses, students will need to be able to quickly scan texts in order to find what they are looking for, such as key terms and examples of those terms, or answers to comprehension or discussion questions. Students will likely need at least some in-class training with scanning so that they don't just read all the words too carefully and forget what they are looking for.
- *Skimming*. Skimming refers to being able to look quickly over a text and get the main idea of the text. It is different from scanning, because with scanning you are looking for specific information, and you probably slow down and read carefully when you find the section you are looking for. With skimming, you are looking for main ideas. EMI students will benefit from skimming a text before they start to read it in detail more carefully. This will help them create an overall outline in their minds of what the text is about. They might also look for key vocabulary terms while skimming that they think they should review before reading the text in detail.
- *Identifying opinions*. Identifying opinions refers to readers being able to figure out if a sentence or section is a fact or if it is someone's opinion. This is important in content learning, since if they get confused, students might think something is factual when it isn't. Facts are things that can be proved to be correct, and opinions are things that people believe or think—opinions cannot be proved to be correct. Common words that represent opinions are “think,” “believe,” “seem,” “good,” “better,” “worst,” or “should be.”
- *Inferencing*. Inferencing refers to a reader being able to figure out what a writer means even though the writer doesn't say it directly. A simple example is if a reading says that a solid surface is wet. Possible inferences are that the surface was in the rain, the someone spilled a liquid on it, or that it is in a very humid room. Students will need to be able to make inferences in many EMI courses. It is important for instructors to realize when a text expects students to make inferences, and then either tell students what the meaning is directly, or teach them how to make the inferences in English.

So, reading is a complex process that involves many types of skills. We often forget just how many things we have to do when we read in a first language, let alone other languages. Doing a needs assessment helps us determine what our students might struggle with so that we can plan accordingly. Luckily, we can re-use many strategies and activities that we prepare, when we teach the class again. And we can share our materials with others in the department and build a collection that saves us all time. Hope you enjoyed the video!