# UNIT 1

## HOW TO BUILD YOUR READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

The ASEP Exam focuses on two skills: **Reading and Writing**.

In **Unit 1** we will concentrate **on building your reading comprehension power**.

**Reading** is the cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of deriving meaning and/or constructing meaning (reading comprehension).

**Reading** is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas.

**Reading is an acquired ability**. Acquiring it presupposes a lot of practice, a rich vocabulary, speed and the knowledge of **strategies** that can maximize comprehension.

These **strategies** are:

### ※ SKIMMING
- **Skimming is defined as the search for main ideas**
- **Skimming helps get an idea of what we are about to read.**
- **Skimming is useful when we are seeking specific information** rather than reading for full comprehension. It works well to find **dates**, **names** and **places**.
- We usually **skim** when we have a lot of material to read in a limited amount of time.

There many **techniques** that can be used when skimming:
- Some people read **the first and last paragraphs** of the text.
- Other people read **the first and last sentence of each paragraph**.
- In both cases **we use text organizers** (headlines, secondary headlines or kickers, subheads, headers, footers, pull quotes, sidebars, bulleted lists, title) **connectors**, **illustrations**, **graphs**, **charts**, etc available to guide us as we move down the page. (In case paragraphs are long and include several ideas in them or the writer has stuck the important sentences in the middle, this is not possible).
- **The way to skim is to run our eyes over the text, noting significant information.** It is

not important to understand each word when skimming. Keep in mind that skimming is not to be used as a short cut to reading the entire text. It does not mean that you simply read the first and last paragraphs and you understand everything. Skimming is like having a map of a city you are about to enter.

## ꙮ SCANNING

When we read the newspaper, we probably not always read it word-by-word, instead we scan the texts.

- **Scanning is used to quickly gather the most important information or "gist"**. It is done at a speed three to four times faster than normal reading.

- **Scanning is often used when looking for information, for example, in a dictionary, in a directory, in a timetable, in a chart**. **We search for key words or ideas**.

- In most cases with **scanning** we know what we are looking for, so **we are concentrating on finding a particular answer or detail**.

There are many **techniques** when scanning:

- **Scanning** involves moving our eyes quickly down a page seeking specific words or phrases.

- **Scanning is also used when you first find a resource to determine whether it will answer your questions**.

-When **scanning**, look for the author's use of **organizers**, such as **numbers** (1, 2, 3), **letters** (a, b, c), **steps or the words**, "first", "second", "third" or "next".

- Also, when **scanning** look for **words that are bold faced, italics or in a different font size, style or even color**. Sometimes an author might put key ideas in the margin.

- Once you've **scanned** a document, you might go back and **skim** it.

## ꙮ USING CONTEXT

- **Context**, in a narrow sense, are **the elements that surround a particular word or phrase and help clarify its meaning**.

- However, **context** in a wider sense means many things, even the context relevant to reading just an individual word.

- **Context** includes **the grammar of sentences and the meanings of words, a paragraph, a whole story or other text**.

- **Context** is also taken to include the **reader's expectations and purposes for reading** and **the various aspects of the location and situation in which the person is reading**.

- **Context** even includes **the reader's entire background of knowledge and experience**.

These various factors operate simultaneously for proficient readers, and usually quite unconsciously. They can affect the identification of single words as well as the reader's understanding of an entire text. The automatic use of context or of multiple contexts is a crucial part of the reading process, though most people don't realize it.

## ⑩ EXTENSIVE READING

- **Extensive reading** is used to obtain **a general or global understanding of a subject**.
- **Extensive reading** is usually practiced on **longer texts** which are slightly above or below the reading level comprehension of the reader, with little unknown vocabulary and grammar.
- The **texts usually include one or two new words per page and maybe one new sentence structure per text**. The new words are often learned entirely through context.
- **Extensive reading activities** are **summaries** and **discussions**.

- **Extensive reading** can**:**
  - provide massive **comprehensible input**
  - **enhance** the readers **general language competence**
  - increase **knowledge** of **previously learned vocabulary**
  - lead to **improvement in writing**
  - **motivate** readers to **keep reading**
  - **consolidate** previously learned **language**
  - help to **build confidence** with extended texts

## ⑩ INTENSIVE READING

- **Intensive reading** is used on shorter texts **to extract specific information/details** in comparison to extensive reading, which involves learners reading texts to develop general reading skills.
- **Intensive reading activities include skimming** a text for specific information to answer **true or false statements** or **filling gaps** in a summary, **scanning a text** to match headings to paragraphs, and **scanning jumbled paragraphs** and then reading them carefully to put them into the correct order.

## ⑩ BEFORE YOU READ

### Preview to establishing context, purpose and content
- Before you read, you need to establish **what your purpose for reading is**. Knowing your **purpose** will help you focus your attention on relevant aspects of the text. Take a moment to reflect and clarify your goal.

- Next, take steps to **familiarize yourself with the background of the text** and **gain useful overview of its content and structure**. (Texts are usually organized using one of the following structures: Generic List, Sequential List, Description, Compare/Contrast, Problem/Solution, Cause/Effect). Ask yourself: What is the context of the reading (the occasion, when and where it was published and to whom it is addressed)? What is its purpose (what is the author trying to establish, either by explaining, arguing, analyzing or narrating)? What is its general content (what is the overall subject matter)?

- Once you have an initial sense of the **context, purpose** and **content**, glance through the text, looking at **the title** and any **subtitles** and **noting general ideas that are tipped off by these cues**.

- Continue flipping pages quickly and **scanning paragraphs**, **getting the gist** of what material the text covers and how that material is ordered.

- After looking over the text as a whole, **read through the introductory paragraph or section**, recognizing that many authors will provide an overview of their message as well as an explicit statement of their thesis or main point **in the opening portion of the text**.

- Do you already know something about the topic? Think about **past experiences** with other subjects you know about and how they may connect to what you will read.

### Consider your purpose

- **Are you looking for** information, main ideas, complete comprehension or detailed analysis or all?
- How will you **use** this text?
- What does the title **mean**?
- What can you **discover** about the "when", "where" and "for whom" of the article?
- What does background or summary information provided by the author or editor **predict** the text will do?

### Scan the text

- Are there any **boldface headings, titles, subtitles, focus questions and any questions** at the beginning of the text?
- Are there any **typographical aids** such as italics, visual aids such as graphs, charts, maps, pictures, diagrams?
- Does there seem to be a **clear introduction and conclusion**? Where?
- **Are the different parts** (for example: paragraphs) **of the text marked**? What does each seem to be about? What claims does the author make at the beginnings and endings of parts?
- Are there **key words** that are repeated of put in bold or italics?

- What kinds of **development and detail** do you notice? Does the text include **statistics**, **tables** and **pictures** or is it **primarily prose**? Are **names** or **places** repeated frequently?

## ⑅ WHILE YOU READ

### Read and Annotate the text

- Whatever your purposes are for reading a particular piece, you have **three objectives to meet as you read**:

    a) to **identify** the author's most important points

    b) to **recognize** how they fit together

    c) to **note** how you respond to them

In a sense, you do the same thing as a reader every day when you sort through directions, labels, advertisements and other sources of written information

- To help understand and use effectively the information offered by the text you read, while reading think of

- What are you **looking for**?
- How will you **use** what you find?

**Do:**

- **Double underline the author's explanation of the main point(s) and jot MP [main point(s)] in the margin. (Often, but not always the writer will tell the reader where the text is going).**
- **Underline each major argument that the author uses in developing his main points and write "arg. 1", "arg. 2" and so on in the margin.**
- **Circle major points of transition from the obvious (subtitles) to the less obvious (connectors and phrases like, "however, on the other hand, for example, so on, although).**
- **Asterisk major pieces of evidence like statistics, quotes, or first-hand or eye-witness testimonies.**
- **Write "concl." in the margin at points where the writer draws major conclusions. Locate parts and phrases that trigger reactions.**
- **Put a question mark next to the words or phrases whose meaning you do not know or cannot infer based on context.**
- **Put an exclamation point next to points that are unclear and note whether you need additional information or the author has been unclear or whether the passage just sounds unreasonable or out-of-place.**

## ⁂ AFTER READING

**Answer the multiple choice questions**

Now that you have read and comprehended your text you must be ready to answer the multiple choice questions that follow it, which may be of the following types:

a) **Positive factual questions:** which usually include words such as "how, what, when, where, which, who, why, if, according…, of the following, most…").

b) **Negative factual questions:** which usually include words such as "not, except, least").

c) **Main idea questions:** which are usually phrased "the main purpose…, the main idea…, mainly discusses…, the main topic…").

d) **Viewpoint questions:** which are usually phrased "the tone of the text…, the author describes…, the writer's attitude…, the author's purpose, the writer's attitude…")

e) **Inferential questions:** in this case you will be called to demonstrate that you can draw conclusions about what you have read or that you can recognize conclusions drawn by the writer of the text. These questions are usually phrased "why…, likely…, probably…, it can be inferred…, it can be concluded…").

f) **Cause/Effect questions:** they are usually introduced with "since, because of, as a result, because, therefore, due to, consequently, for this reason...). You might be called to match the cause with its effect.

g) **Sequential order questions/chronological order questions:** they are usually phrased with "first, second, after, before, next, initially, finally, to begin with, at the end, at the beginning, the first/last step).

h) **Differentiating between fact and opinion questions:** here you are called to demonstrate that you can tell between what is fact in a text and what is opinion – that of the writer's or of others used by the writer to illustrate his points.

i) **Vocabulary questions:** you will usually be asked to find a synonym or a phrase with similar meaning and less often the antonym of a word. Keep in mind that the meaning of the word should always be determined in relation to the context of the text.
   **- Here are some context clues that can help you decide on the meaning of words**
   The context of a word consists of **the sentence containing the unknown word** as well as **the other sentences that surround it**. The construction of the sentence may contain clues to the word's meaning.

1) **Sentences including a definition**. Sometimes a definition is included in the sentence itself.
   For example: People who suffer from <u>acrophobia</u>, or <u>fear of heights</u>, shouldn't climb. Acrophobia is explained **with the phrase in the parentheses**.

2) **Sentences including an example:** Sometimes an example is included to illustrate word meanings.

For example: Mr. Jones is a real <u>recluse; he lives alone on the edge of town and he only comes out of his house to go to work</u>. Here the meaning of the word <u>recluse</u> is suggested by the **example given in the rest of the sentence** (or a following sentence that might serve the same purpose). The example that <u>he lives alone on the edge of town and he only comes out of his house to go to work</u> suggests that Mr. Jones likes to be alone, and the definition of <u>recluse</u> does mean a person who lives a life away from society.

3) **Sentences including words that show contrast:** Sometimes the unknown word is used **in contrast to a word that is familiar** in order to help the reader determine the meaning of a word.

For example: <u>Unlike</u> Mr. Dixon, who is <u>extremely nervous</u>, Mr. Benton is very <u>mellow</u>. Here <u>mellow</u> is shown in contrast to <u>extremely nervous</u>, so mellow must mean calm. In fact, mellow means mild, gentle and agreeable.

4) **The logic of the sentence**. Sometimes an unfamiliar word **can be figured out using our knowledge** about the world or an understanding of a particular situation.

For example: When the baby sitter put a <u>pacifier</u> in the baby's mouth, the baby stopped crying. You have probably seen a baby become quiet after someone put an object which looks like a nipple on a baby bottle into the baby's mouth. Remembering this might give you a clue for the meaning of <u>pacifier</u>, even if you have never seen the word written.

5) **The grammar – or word order – within the sentence.** Where a word is **located** and the **grammatical use** of a word in a sentence may give clues to its meaning, especially if it is a word that has multiple meanings. Is the word being used as a verb, a noun, an adjective or an adverb? Looking at the grammar of a sentence – whether or not you can remember the grammatical name of the part of speech – may especially help you on the ASEP Exam where you may be given a word in a sentence and asked to choose which word in another sentence has the same meaning.

    Example 1: Paok <u>beat</u> (verb) Aris by 2 points.
    Example 2: The policeman walked his <u>beat</u> (noun).
    Example 3: I feel <u>beat</u> (adjective) today.
    Example 4: My brother <u>beat</u> (verb) me at a game of Monopoly

If you identify the part of speech it might be easier to choose from the four synonyms given you in the multiple choice question.

6) **Clues within the words themselves – word parts:** Many English words are formed from combinations of Greek and Latin **prefixes**, **roots** and **suffixes**. Knowing some of

these important word parts can greatly increase your ability to figure out and understand new words. For example: Many politicians still favor the use of <u>geothermal</u> energy. If you recognize "geo" from the much more common word "geography", you may know that the prefix "geo" means "earth". Then you could use the root word "therm" to think of "thermometer" or "thermos" which have to do with temperature and heat. These clues may suggest that the meaning of the word <u>geothermal</u> is something to do with the earth's heat.

## ☶ USEFUL VOCABULARY FOR MORE EFFICIENT READING

**Genre** = a term used to describe **broad types of writing**, such as narrative, expository, response, critique, persuasion, fiction, non-fiction.

**Purpose** = author's **intent** for writing (entertain, express himself, inform, persuade, analyze, etc)

**Point of view** = **the perspective** from which the reader views the events in his text; determines what the writer can know and tell about first, second or third person.

**Thesis statement** = the **main point** of a piece of writing.

**Theme** = the **general idea** or insi ght about life that a writer wishes to convey in his writing.

**Mood** = **Feeling** about a subject created for a reader by a writer's selection of words and details.

**Tone** = the writer's **attitude** toward a subject – detached, ironic, serious, angry…

**Organized paragraph** = focused around a central theme or idea by organization (natural order, logical order) and development (examples and details, compare and contrast, cause and/or effect, analysis or classification).

**Topic sentence** = a sentence intended to express the **main idea** in a paragraph or passage.

**Supporting details: Specific examples** and **pieces of information** that support a thesis statement, topic sentence or main idea of a writing piece.

**Lead =** two to three sentences included **in the introductory paragraph** which are meant to capture the readers interest, examples of types of leads include: questions, descriptions, dialogues and anecdotes.

## ☶ A WORD OF ADVICE

In preparation for the ASEP Exam, read as much as you can, read as many texts as you can from as many different disciplines as you can. Enrich your vocabulary. Make it a habit of writing them down in a notebook specific to this purpose. All this reading practice will also help you in the writing part of the exam. Don't forget: Practice makes perfect.