# READING STRATEGIES FOR COMPREHENDING LITERAL, INFERENTIAL AND CRITICAL MEANINGS IN READING

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#### Abstract

This paper is aimed at discussing the ways how to comprehend three kinds of meanings—literal, inferential and critical- in reading. These kinds of meanings should be understood by a reader in order that he/she can comprehend a reading text completely. The reader is not only demanded to identify factual information in the text, but also is required to read all information in it. As it is known, there are three types of comprehension, that is, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical comprehension. By literal comprehension, a reader just read all facts in the text, but by inferential comprehension the reader should read what happens behind the facts. Furthermore, the reader is also demanded to read beyond the lines, namely, try to evaluate the messages given by the writer. For this purpose, a reading teacher should be able to help a student to cope with these kinds of meanings. The teacher tries to vary his/her ways in teaching reading in order to achieve this goal. By this effort, it is expected that the students' reading ability will increase from time to time.

Key words: literal, inferential, critical, strategy

## A. Introduction

Reading is one of language skills that should be mastered by a student. To master it is actually not an easy task because the student should understand three kinds of meanings, that is, literal, inferential and critical meaning. Understanding these meanings need a theoretical base. For this, a reading teacher is demanded to provide his/her students with this knowledge.

Based on the writer's experiences and observation, the students do not find difficulties in understanding literal information because they just focus their mind to the facts that are given directly by a writer in the reading selection. On the other hand, when they are asked about the information behind the facts, they are not able to give a correct answer. This is of course a problem that should be solved by English teacher especially reading teacher.

The English teacher should be responsible to overcome these problems. For this purpose, in reading class, the teacher is asked to provide the students with inferential and critical skills in reading. This is important because reading is not only about written facts and information but also about unstated facts. Besides, a reader is also required to be able to evaluate about a writer's ideas. Evaluating the writer's ideas will help the reader to know and recognize all information and as a result the reader will get thorough comprehension.

In this paper, the writer tries to share with the reader about the ways how to read these three types of meanings. It is hoped that all ideas given here will be useful for teaching reading in the future.

#### B. The Nature of Reading.

In teaching reading teachers or students should first know the concept of this language skill. This is important in order that the teachers can teach it well and the students can learn it easily. Alderson (2005:13) states that reading involves perceiving the written form of language either visually or kinesthetically. It is not just looking at words. Reading is a complex, diverse process. The reading process, like many other processes, involves a number of distinct, yet connected, stages. An often overlooked stage in the reading process is preparing to read, preparing both your mind and your surroundings, so that you are able to concentrate on the material. Another stage in reading process involves your eyes (looking at the page) working together with your memory.

Meanwhile, Grabe and Stoller (2002:9) say that reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately. The ability to use the reading process skillfully takes concentration and self-discipline. Before you start a reading session, seek out places where, and times of day when, you'll not be interrupted or distracted by people or noise. Never mislead yourself into thinking you can concentrate adequately when you're in a room where people are talking, or the TV is on, or music is playing loudly, or when you're expecting phone calls. If you are uncomfortable with silence, as some people tend to be, experiment honestly with what gives your comfort; soft, nondstracting music, a clock that ticks reassuringly, or other options. If there's little private time where you live, schedule yourself to read in a quiet

corner of the library or a spot in a park or public building with minimum human traffic. Check out which college classrooms are empty during off-peak class hours.

According to Andie and Shagoury (2006:36), in teaching reading teachers often start with the strategy of making connections. This is not surprising, since reading researchers believe that schema theory, or the idea that learners must connect the new to the known, is the busis for all comprehension instruction. Schema theory comes to life in classrooms when students experiment with making-text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections as they read. Typically in comprehension strategy work, educators use the term "text-to-self" to talk about how texts connect to our lives. Mickulecky (1996:21) states that comprehension is part of life. Every waking minute, your brain is busy making sense of your world. It could be compared, in fact, to a very complicated computer. Messages are constantly coming in about what you see, hear, smell, touch, or taste. Your brain receives these messages, interprets them, sorts them, and save them.

Furthermore, McNamara (2007:3-4) states that reading is an extraordinary achievement when one considers the number of levels and components that must be mastered. Consider what it takes to read a simple story. The words contain graphemes, phonemes, and morphemes. Sentences have syntactic composition, propositions, and stylistic features. Deep comprehension of the sentences requires the construction of referents of nouns, a discourse focus, presuppositions, and plausible inferences.

The reader needs to distinguish given versus new information in the text and implicitly acknowledge what is shared among most readers in a community (called the common ground). At more global levels, the reader needs to identify the genre, rhetorical structure, plot, and perspective of different characters, narrator, theme, story point, and sometimes the attitude of the author. The coding, interpretation, and construction of all of these levels are effortlessly achieved at a rate of 250 to 400 words per minute by a proficient adult reader.

Comprehension is not always effortless and fast, of course, When beginning readers struggle over individual words, reading is slowed to a near halt and deeper levels of comprehension are seriously compromised. This happens when proficient adult readers struggle with technical expository text on unfamiliar areane topics, such as a mortgage on a house or the schematics of computer's operating system. Cognitive strategies are particularly important when there is a breakdown at any level of comprehension. A successful reader implements deliberate, conscious, effortful, time-consuming strategies to repair or circumvent a reading component that is not intact. Reading teachers and programs explicitly teach such reading strategies to handle the challenges of reading obstacles.

One could argue that reading strategies are also important for many adults who consider as skilled readers. There are basically three arguments to bolster this claim. First, many readers do not know whether they are adequately comprehending text. Second, many readers have an illusion of comprehension when they read text because they settle for shallow levels of analysis as a criterion for adequate comprehension Shallow readers believe they have adequately comprehended text if they can recognize the content words and can understand most of the sentences. However, deep comprehension requires inferences, linking ideas coherently, scrutinizing the validity of claims with a critical stance, and sometimes understanding the motives of authors. Shallow readers believe they are comprehending text when in fact they are missing the majority of contradictions and false claims.

Acquisition of better reading strategies is apparently needed to crack the illusion of comprehension in readers who are settling for low standards of comprehension. They need to acquire and implement strategies to facilitate deeper levels of comprehension. Third, nearly all adults have trouble comprehending technical expository text at deep levels even though they are skilled readers. Deep comprehension of technical text is a difficult challenge, because the reader has minimal knowledge of the technical terms, key conceptualizations, mental models, and other forms of background knowledge. Even those with high relevant background knowledge and general reading skills can struggle.

Blachoqicz (2008: 33-34) states that a great deal of research has explored and supported the notion that comprehension is a process demanding strategic approaches. Good comprehenders have learned that they have control of the reading process. They actively construct meaning as they read, and they also direct their occumprehending by using basic strategies and by monitoring their own understanding. They know how reading works because they have knowledge about how sounds, letters, and print work (declarative knowledge); they know what strategies to use to help them understand (procedural knowledge); and they know when to use which strategies (conditional" knowledge).

Ostrov (2002:33) says that if you find any confusing words stop and look them up, or else you may end up "reading" something different than what the author wrote. This is a great cause of poor comprehension. It's not that you totally don't understand the author, but that what you think he is saying is different than what he is actually saying. This can happen because what you think a word means may be different than what the author thinks it means. When you speak with someone, you can always check to make

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sure that each of you understands the other. This is a two-way flow of communication. When you read, this opportunity doesn't exist; there is a one-way flow of written symbols from the author to the reader.

The written symbols represent spoken words. The spoken words themselves represent other things in the real world. Since you learned to speak as a child, your vocabulary is partially based on what your parents and others around you thought words meant and how they should be used. These meanings may not be correct, complete or applicable even though you have used them your entire life. No one is "to blame" for this. They just passed them along. Luckily for us all, there is a collection of word rules and meanings we can check against — this is the dictionary.

Unfortunately, the dictionary is not used enough. What often happens is the reader guesses at the word and continues. Then, what the reader thought the author meant is not quite what the author actually intended. Again, this stems from the fact that what the reader thinks a particular word means is not the same meaning that the author used. It might be close, then again it might not, but the dictionary is the place to find out for sure.

Suppose for a minute we consider each word to be a brick. The author has a building in his mind which he takes apart brick-by-brick and passes one-by-one (via printed or written words) to the reader. The reader then reconstructs them in his own mind, brick-by-brick (or word-by-word). Thus, if the reader exactly and correctly rebuilds the structure, he will correctly perceive what the author had in his mind.

# C. Literal Comprehension or Reading on the Lines

Literal comprehension or commonly called reading on the lines means understanding the stated meaning of the material. Here you look for the exact, literal meaning of what's written. To identify a reading selection's central theme and main ideas, you usually need to "read on the lines". In structured reading, three kinds of exercises have been designed especially to help you develop your ability to read on the lines: "Vocabulary", "Central Theme and Main Ideas" and "Major Details".

# 1. Vocabulary Analysis

When you possess a large vocabulary you can express and think about fine shades of meaning. You can think with precision. For example, unless you are a sailor, you probably refer to all the various lines on a sail boat as "ropes". Ropes, however, is a basic, generic term, suitable only for arm chair discussion. When the wind is blowing a gale, and the waves are covering the deck with solid sheets of water, you want to yell out to your crew something more specific than "tighten the rope". Sailors say such exact phrases as "harden the jip sheet", "case the boom vang and rig a starboard preventer" or "mind the dingy painter while we back down on the anchor rode". Such precious, communicate clearly at a mature level. Whether you are reading, writing, or speaking at the college level about suiling or science, about football or philosophy, about literature or sociology, a strong vocabulary is essential. Every adult, no matter what age, is capable of learning and using new vocabulary words. The simple truth is that you will remember new words only when you make up your mind to use them as often as possible. Memorization without usage is an effective.

# 2. Recognizing Main Idea

The main idea is the key message in a paragraph or several paragraphs. The main idea is the thesis, the topic, the subject of a subsection of paragraph within a whole piece of reading. Main ideas usually appear at the beginning of paragraphs, especially in textbooks, articles and essays. Yet, many times, authors place the main idea at the end of a paragraph so that they can lead up to a small climax. Sometimes, writers put the main idea in the middle of the paragraph so that related material can surround it.

Just as every paragraph has a topic, every paragraph has a main idea. When an author includes a sentence in a paragraph that tell his on her most important point about the topic, that sentence is called the stated main idea sentence. Most textbook paragraphs contain stated main ideas. The main idea answers the question, "what is the author's one most important point about the topic?"

The stated main idea sentence can appear anywhere in a puragraph. Author most often place it at the beginning of a puragraph. The rest of the sentences will be details that explain more about it, give examples of it, or prove it. The end of the paragraph is the next most likely location of the stated main idea sentence. Authors know that you may need certain information before you can understand the main idea, so they give the details first and save the main idea for last. The third possibility is that the main idea sentence appears within the paragraph. They may start the paragraph with a question, and then answer it.

Being able to identify the main idea will enable you to:

- Know what to highlight or underline in you: textbooks
- Write correct outlines and summaries
- Remember the information more easily.
- Make higher test grades



· Write better paragraph and essay test answer.

Understand how the author organizes the information in a paragraph

3. Identifying the Stated Main Idea Sentence

In identifying stated main idea, you can make such a group work. In the group work you can exchange your opinion each other. If one of your friends opinion is acceptable. It can be the topic of the paragraph. In short, here in this step you and your friends show up your each opinion and then discuss it.

# Pointers from the Coach about Identifying the Stated Main Idea Sentence

Only one sentence can be the stated main idea sentence of a paragraph.

Avoid choosing a sentence as the stated main idea simply because the information in it interests you, it contains familiar information, or you think it "sounds important".

Be sure that you understand the information in the main idea sentence.

Because main idea is always a sentence, do not select a question as the stated main idea

Examples are details that support the main idea, so examples can never be the main idea.

Watch for certain words and phrases that authors frequently use to signal their most important point, the main idea.

Read the entire paragraph before you decide what the author's main point is.

 Longer selections such as entire sections of textbook chapters, essays, articles, editorials, and so forth, also have an overall stated main idea.

## D. Inferential Comprehension (Reading Between The Lines)

Making inferences is sometimes called "reading between the lines." This means you use the information in the text to guess other things about the text. It is often necessary to make inferences when you read. Sometimes you need to guess about information the writer has not put there. Other times you may need to guess about meaning when you do not know all the words. Good readers make inferences asll the time as they read.

The inferences you make may not always be correct, even though you based them on the available information. The water under the sink might have been the result of a spill. The traffic you encountered on the expressway might be normal for that time of day, but you didn't know it because you aren't normally on the road then. An inference is only the best guess you can make in a situation, given the information you have.

Each inference you make depends on the situation, the facts provided, and your own knowledge and experience. Here are a few guidelines to help you make inferences,

# Understand the literal meaning.

Be sure you have a firm grasp of the literal meaning. You must understand the stated ideas and facts before you can move to higher levels of thinking, which include inference making. You should recognize the topic, main idea, key details, and organizational pattern of each paragraph you have read.

b. Notice details.

As you are reading, pay particular attention to details that are unusual or stand out. Often such details will offer you clues to help you make inferences. Ask yourself: what is unusual or striking about this piece of information? Why is it included here?

c. Add up facts

Consider all the facts taken together. To help you do this, ask yourself such questions as the following: What is the writer trying to suggest from this set of facts? What do all these facts and ideas seem to point toward or add up to? Why did the author include these facts and details?

d. Be alert to clues.

Writers often provide you with numerous hints that can point you toward accurate inferences. An awareness of word choices, details included (and omitted), and ideas emphasized, and direct commentary can help you determine a textbook author's attitude toward the topic at hand.

e. Ask yourself questions such as:

- •What is the author trying to suggest through the stated information?
- What do all the facts and ideas point toward or seem to add up to?

◆For what purpose did the author include these facts and details?

To answer these questions, you must add together the individual pieces of information to arrive at an inference. Making an inference is somewhat like putting together a complicated picture puzzle in which you try to make each piece fit with all the rest of the pieces to form something recognizable.

f. Consider the author's purpose. An awareness of the author's purpose is often helpful in making inferences. If an author's purpose is to convice you to purchase a particular product, as in an ISELT-3 2015

advertisement, you already have a clear idea of the types of inferences the writer hopes you will make as you begin reading,

g. Verify your inference. Once you have made an inference, be sure to check that it is accurate. Look back at the stated facts to be sure you have sufficient evidence to support the inference. Also, be sure you have not overlooked other equally plausible or more plausible inferences that could be drawn from the same set of facts.

# Inferences can also be made through several hints as given below:

- Action. Usually a writer gives some hints in the form of action done by c character. The character may
  do a certain action like walking quietly, looking around, entering a place silently, etc. This action will
  help the reader to make inferences.
- Conversation. Beside action, the writer may also write a conversation between two person in the text. This conversation will become a clue by the reader to make inference.
- Description. A writer might make a description about a person, place or object. This description will help
  the reader to know the meaning behind the stated facts.
- Appearance. By appearance a writer gives a picture, visual aids or cartoon in the text. Besides, the writer might also tells the reader a certain appearance of someone or object. This is like a description, but it is not described in details.
- Commentary. The writer might write his or her commentary about certain information in the text. By this commentary the reader can make inference.

## Understanding Implied Main Idea

Occasionally, a writer does not directly state the main idea of a given paragraph in a topic sentence. Instead, he or she leaves it up to the reader to infer, or reason out, what the main idea of the paragraph. This type of paragraph is called unstated main idea. This type of paragraph contains only details or specifics that are related to a given topic and substantiate an unstated main idea.

Use the following steps as a guide to find implied main ideas:

- 1. Find the topic,
  - The topic is the general subject of the entire paragraph. Ask yourself: "What is the one thing the author is discussing throughout the paragraph?"
- Figure out what is the most important idea the writer wants you to know about that topic. Look at each detail and decide what larger idea is being explained.
- Express this main idea in your own words. Make sure that the main idea is a reasonable one. Ask
  yourself: "Does it apply to all of the details in the paragraph?"

#### Example

Some advertisers rely on star power. Commercials may use celebrities, for example, to encourage consumers to purchase a product. Other commercials may use an "everyone's buying it" approach, arguing that thousands of consumers could not possibly be wrong in the choice, so the product must be worthwhile. Still other commercials may use visual appeal to catch the consumers' interest and persuade them to make purchases.

The general topic in the paragraph is commercials. More specifically, the paragraph is about the various persuasive devices used in commercials. Three details are given: (1) star power, (2) everyone's-buying-it approach, and (3) visual appeal. Each of the three details is a different persuasive device. The main point the writer is trying to make, then, is that commercials use a variety of persuasive devices to appeal to consumers. You can figure out this writer's main idea even though no single sentence states this directly.

# E. Critical Reading or Reading Beyond the Lines

Critical reading can be defined as very high-level comprehension of written material requiring interpretation and evaluation skill that enable the reader to separate important from unimportant information, distinguish between facts and opinions, and determine a writer's purpose and tone. Critical reading also entails using inference to go beyond what is stated explicitly, filling in information gaps, and coming to logical conclusions. These various skill require much thought, and that is why critical reading is dependent on critical thinking.

The most characteristic features of critical reading are that you will:

- examine the evidence or arguments presented;
- · check out any influences on the evidence or arguments;
- check out the limitations of study design or focus;
- · examine the interpretations made; and



 decide to what extent you are prepared to accept the authors' arguments, opinions, or conclusions.

Reading beyond the lines means you develop informed opinions about the subject being discussed in the material you are reading. To do this come to your own conclusions based on what's been stated (on the lines) and what has been implied (between the lines). There are two forms from beyond the line:

# 1. Evaluating the Author's Message

Evaluate the Source

Checking the source can help you evaluate the accuracy and completeness of the information it contains. Suppose you were doing a research paper on the economic advantages of waste recycling. You found that each of the following sources contained information that would be most useful in writing a term paper?

## 2. Evaluating the Author's Technique

Pay Attention to Connotative Language

Connotations can vary from individual to individual. Writers and speakers use connotative meanings to stir you emotionss or to bring to mind possitive or negative associations. Suppose a writeer is describing how someone drinks. The writer could choose words such as gulp, sip, slurp, or guzzle. Each creates a different image of the person. Connotative meanings, then, are powerful tools of language. When you read, be alert for meanings suggested by the author's word choice. When writing or speaking, be sure to choose words with appropriate connotations.

Examine Figurative Language

Figurative language is a powerful tool that allows writers to create images or paint pictures in the reader's mind. We all know the devastation caused by a tornado and have a visual picture of it. Figurative language also allows writers to suggest an idea without directly stating it. There are three primary types of figurative language: smiles, metaphors, and personification.

 A smile uses the words like or as to make the comparison. For example: The computer hums like a beehive.

After 5:00 p.m our downtown is as quite as a ghost town.

 A metaphor states or implies the relationship between the two unlike items. Metaphors often use the word is. For example:

The computer lab is a beehive.

After 5:00 p.m our downtown is as quite as a ghost town.

3) Personification compares humans and nonhumans according to one characteristic, attributing human characteristics to ideas or objects. If you say "the wind screamed its angry message," you are giving the wind the humanlike characteristics of screaming, being angry, and communicating a message. For example:

The sun mocked us with its relentless glare.

After two days of writer's block, her pen started dancing across the page.

Watch for Missing Information

One way writers avoid revealing information is to use a particular sentence structure that does not identify who performed a specified action. In the sentence *The cup broke*, you do not know who broke the cup. In the sentence *The bill was paid*, you do not know who paid the bill. This sentence pattern is called the passive voice. Here are few more examples of the passive voice. In each, notice what information is missing.

The tax reform bill was defeated

The accounting procedures were found to be questionable

The oil spill was contained

# Be Alert for Generalizations

Suppose you are reading an article that states that "Artists are temperamental people." Do you think that every artist who over painted a portrait or composed a song is temperamental? Can you think of exeptions? This statement is a example of a generalization. A generalization is a statement about an entire group (musicians) based on known information about part of the group (musicians the writer has met or observed). A generalization requires a leap from what is known to a conclusion about what is unknown. Here are a few more generalizations:

- · Pets are always troublesome
- · Chinese food is never filling.

The key to evaluating generalization is to evaluate the type, quality, and amount of evidence of given to support them. Here are a few more generalizations. What type of evidence would you need to convince you that each is not true?

· Fast food lacks nutritional value

Another way to evaluate a generalization is to try to think of exceptions. For the generalization medical doctors are aloof and inaccessible, can you think of a doctor you have met or heard about who was caring and available to his or her patients? If so, the generalization is not accurate in all cases.

3. Is the Material Fact or Opinion?

When morking with any source, try to determine whether the material is factual or an expression of opinion. Facts are statements that can be verified—that is, proven to be true or false. Opinions are statements that express feelings, attitudes, or beliefs and are neither true nor false. Below are examples of each.

Facts: More than one million teenagers become pregnant every year.

The costs of medial care increase every year.

Opinions: Government regulation of our private lives should be halted immediately.

By the year 2015, most Americans will not be able to afford routine health

care:

# 4. What is the Author's Purpose?

Writers have many different reasons or purposes for writing. Read the following statements and try to decide why each was written.

 About 14,000 ocean-going ships pass through the Panama Canal each year. This averages to about three ships per day.

If a choking person has fallen down, first turn him or her face up. Then knit together the fingers
of both your hands and apply pressure with the heel of your bottom hand to the victim's
abdomen.

## 5. What is the Tone?

The tone of a speaker's voice helps you interpret what he or she is saying. If the following sentence were read aloud, the speaker's voice would tell you how to interpret it: "Would you mind closing the door?" The tone of a writer can be seen in the following:

- Intrusive: When purchasing a piece of clothing, one must be concerned with quality as well as with price. Be certain to check for the following: double-stiched seams, matched patterns, and ample linings.
- Sympathetic: The forlorn, frightened-looking child wandered through the streets alone, searching for someone who would show an interest in helping her find her parents.
- Persuasive: Child abuse is a tragic occurrence in our society. Strong legislation is needed to
  control the abuse of innocent victims and to punish those who are insensitive to the rights and
  feelings of others.
- d. Humorous: Those people who study animal behavior professionally must dread those times when their cover is blown at a dinner party. The unfortunate souls are sure to be seated next to someone with animal stories.

#### 6. Is the Author Biased?

Bias refers to an author's partiality, inclination toward a particular viewpoint or prejudice. A writer is biased if he or she takes one side of a controversial issue and does not recognize opposing viewpoints. Perhaps the best example of bias is in advertising. To identify bias, use the following suggestions:

- a. Analyze connotative meanings. Do you encounter a large number of positive or negative terms used to describe the subject?
- b. Notice descriptive language. What impression is created?
- c. Analyze the tone. The author's tone often provides important clues.
- d. Look for opposing viewpoints.

Read each of the following statements and place a check mark in front of each one that reveals bias

- 1. Testing the harmful effects of cosmetics on innocent animals is an outrage.
- Campaign finance reform is essential to restoring both the integrity of the election process and the faith of Americans in our political system.
- The longest siege of the Civil War tok place in Petersburg, Virginia, when Union troopsblocked Confederate supply lines from June 1864 to April 1865.



- Students should not waste their time joining fraternities and sororities; they should concentrate on their academic coursework.
- 5. Bicycling is the only way to fully experience the beautiful scenery of southern France.

## 7. How Strong Are the Data and Evidence?

Many writers who express their opinions or state viewpoints provide the reader with data or evidence to support their ideas. Your task as a critical reader is to weigh and evaluate the quality of this evidence. You must examine the evidence and assess its adequacy. You should be concerned with two factors, the type of evidence being presented, and the relevance of that evidence. Various of evidence include:

- a. Personal experience or observation.
- b. Expert opinion
- c. Research citation.
- d. Statistical data
- e. Examples, descriptions of particular events, or illustrative situations,
- f. Analogies (comparison with similar situations)
- g. Historical documentation.
- h. Quotations.

## F. Conclusion and Suggestions

Reading is a complex process. When reading a reader will try to recognize and identify three types of meanings, namely, literal, inferential and critical meanings. By literal, the reader just focuses his/her attention to written facts in a reading selection. He/she tries to answer questions about factual information. In the contrary, by inferential reading, the reader will go deeper to the meaning the written facts. These facts will be used to know and identify the implied meanings which are not stated directly in the reading text. But, the reader will use his experience and background knowledge or information in the real world to catch the ideas given by the writer. Meanwhile, by critical reading the reader does not only try to recognize the stated meaning and implied meaning, but should go beyond that information. In this case, the reader is demanded to evaluate the writer ideas in several aspects. This sub skill is very useful because the reader will be to distinguish whether the writer writes opinions or facts, or whether the writer writes bias information, or be/she is making humor, angry, etc.

By having the ability to differentiate each meaning, the reader will be able to read any kind of text. And more than that, he/she can read the reading text easily and quickly.

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