

Improving Reading and Writing in a Second Language

This resource suggests strategies you can use to develop your fluency in reading and writing. *Fluency* is the ability to use a language quickly and smoothly and communicate ideas effectively.

Improving your Reading Fluency

Think positively about your knowledge

- Read in the language to improve your skills.
- Focus on what you understand, not on what you don't understand.

Read without stopping

- Do not stop and start or re-read passages too often.
- Avoid frequently using a dictionary.
- Read in sections one by one without stopping.
- After reading a section, go back and look at the difficult parts if necessary.

Read with a purpose

- Think about why you are reading the text.
- Think about what information you need from the text.
- Focus on reading for meaning instead of reading for translation.

Look for key words

To read faster, look for words or phrases that have meaning (these are called "meaning groups"). The sentences below are divided into meaning groups:

Psychology, // broadly defined, // is the systematic study // of behavior and experience. // Within that definition, // there are many kinds // of subspecialists // with diverse interests and viewpoints (Kalat 1986).

Next, cross out all the small words in the text (articles, prepositions, etc.). The passage would look like this:

Psychology, broadly defined, is the systematic study of behavior and experience. Within that definition, there are many kinds of subspecialists with diverse interests and viewpoints.

Read the words that remain. You can get a lot of meaning from them! After practicing this, you will pay more attention to the most important words.

Improving your Writing Fluency

Try these steps to improve your writing fluency in a second language:

1. Research or brainstorm ideas before writing a draft. Make a list.
2. Organize your ideas into an outline or sequence.
3. Make a first draft. At this point, focus on writing your ideas without worrying about grammatical correctness.
4. After writing a complete draft, review your paper in steps by asking these questions:
 - Have you developed your ideas enough and provided enough explanation and support?
 - Are the connections between ideas clear (this is called *coherence*)?
 - Have you only included information which directly contributes to the points you are trying to make (this is called *unity*)?
5. As a last step, check for grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling and word choice errors.

Practice free writing

If you find it difficult to write without thinking in your first language and translating, try free writing.

This will help you depend less and less on your native language. Follow the steps below:

- Write for 20 minutes without stopping 3 times a week until you are no longer translating.
- Start with easy topics such as what you did today. Later, try writing on more difficult topics.
- Do not stop or worry about grammar, spelling or word choice. Just write!

Final Tips to Remember

- Use the language you are learning as much as possible. You will learn the language faster.
- Try to think in the language you are learning. Summarize ideas both silently and aloud to before you write.
- Try to use a monolingual dictionary (like the Longman dictionary) instead of a bilingual dictionary or translator.
- Focus on meaning instead of correctness. Don't focus too much on grammar rules. Sometimes language cannot be explained by rules.
- Try to guess when you don't know. Making mistakes is an important part of the language learning process.
- Pay attention to what you understand, not what you're missing.