

Teaching reading skills

Our course at the YMCA focuses on three different kinds of reading methods. I have tried to incorporate technology into each of them, while still trying to stay authentic to the language and the specific material.

1. Comprehension and language focused graded reading

- (i) Tutorial style study guides are made available, so that students can preview before hand, and take initiative by being autonomous in their own study of the materials.
- (ii) Interactive cloze activities provide both revision and practice for future tests.
- (iii) links to resources that help with reading, show students how to go about their own study, and test their reading ability.

2. Reading skills

On my web page, so far I have focused on vocabulary (cloze activities), basic comprehension (study guide questions) and activities for understanding phrases (collocations and idiomatic expressions). I would however, like to incorporate:

Task	Skill/Activity	Example
Speed reading tasks	Skimming	* Having timed readings with comprehension questions
Thinking skills	Multiple Choices	* Short paragraph with interactive multiple choice activities
Understanding topics	Ss will be asked to click on the incorrect answer for (a) and for (b) select the best answer from a number of alternatives/or checks an answer box when they have answered the question.	(a) Which topic does not belong? Eg. <i>Elephants, Zebras, African animals, lions tigers.</i> (b) What is the topic? Eg. <i>Fuel pump, carburetor, cylinders, valves, pistons</i> (answer = part of a car engine)
Patterns of organization	(a) Sequencing – ordering of a sequences of events (b) Comparison/contrast – choosing similar or different (c) Cause and effect – which event or action causes another. (d) Listing – making a list of supporting details.	(a) Four sentences in a story jumbled. The Ss have to order them so they make a logical story. (b) Having a paragraph comparing two cities – then having about 5 statements. The Ss have to select same or different referring to the paragraph. (c) Have a paragraph discussing some cause and effect situation – multiple choices activity for the effect. (d) Group of words. Ss must sort them under the correct headings.
Making inferences	Understanding what is the referent.	(a) E.g. I found it on the footpath (sidewalk). It was very tiny, and it was hardly breathing. I fed it and cared for it until it got better. Then it flew away. What is it? - Multiple choice activity
Main ideas	What is the main idea?	Looking for the main idea in a paragraph. Ss read a paragraph then choose the best possible main idea.
Summarizing	Summarize a sentence by taking out the unnecessary words.	E.g. The tall cowboy put the saddle on his horse, untied him from the fence, waved goodbye and rode off into the sunset. (a) The cowboy left (b) The cowboy untied his horse and left. (c) The cowboy waved goodbye and rode into the sunset.

Adapted from Mikulecky, B. S., Jefferies, L. (1996). *More reading power*, U.S.A: Addison-Wesley publishing.

3. Extensive reading.

At the moment, extensive reading at our school is handled with real books in a small multi-level library of graded readers and authentic magazines. I have tried to offer further reading practice online at my website, through hyperlinks (reading and other media resources such as video: Youtube) to added resources to provide background knowledge, or schema building activities for future classroom discussions. I would however, like to devote one page in a kind of directory, such as Yahoo, of reading sites for extensive reading purposes. This site would have hyper-links to various pages on the web, where Ss can further explore themes that come out of classroom discussions.

Teaching writing skills

In writing class I have made extensive use of online blogs and discussion forums under the heading of creative writing and computer programs, such as word and online resources for structured writing.

Kind of Writing	Activity	Description	Effectiveness
Creative Writing	Blog	Ss write 50 words per week on a pre-determined subject. Ss must also write comments throughout the semester on other Ss work.	* Ss slowly get engaged in the activity, which is enhanced when they are allowed to post pictures on the blog. * It turns into a collaborative project that brings the class together.
Creative Writing	Discussion Board response to video.	Ss respond and discuss aspects of a theme online as a class group.	* Ss seem to start slowly, but are writing a significant amount by the end of semester. * Ss tend to get into very interesting discussions, especially when engaged in the drama/sitcom.
Structured Writing	Word processors and grammar/spell checkers	Ss have an opportunity to use the computer lab for typing up assignments, and using the computers and the internet to edit work.	* Ss often complain about not having enough time to type assignments, so when we scheduled time for them, they really appreciated it, and made use of the resource. This is a good way to increase student motivation.
Structured Writing	Checking out model writing online	Ss can be directed to pages online through hyperlinks, so they can see models of the kind of writing, or tutorials on how create paragraphs and essays.	The effectiveness would be limited by the page's ease of use and the Ss language competency.
Creative and structured writing	e-mail	Students can take part in peer editing, or general communication on specified topics.	The effectiveness will depend upon a number of aspects, including how proficient peers are at giving advice, and whether there are specified goals for Ss to work towards.

Teaching listening skills

In the past 6 months I have started to make use of listening activities online through my blog, and links to other teachers sites.

Kind of Listening	Activity	Description	Examples
Top-Down processing	VOA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Voice of America provides reading and listening practice to students in both authentic and special English. * I have tried to combine it with vocabulary and reading/listening activities. Also, there are interactive vocabulary activities (cloze). * I would like to add more videos to back up the ideas contained in the lessons * There are some great sites out there with quizzes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mondos VOA lessons (click here) * VOA quizzes by Charles I. Kelly (click here)
Top-Down processing	ELLLO	* I have taken some of the programs and organized them under major themes that we usually cover in our classes. I direct students to listen to the interviews for extra practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mondos Link to ELLLO (click here) * ELLLO site by Todd Beuckens. (click here)
Top-Down processing	Videos	* There are numerous videos taken from Youtube to back up topics and themes throughout my website. The videos are all embedded and provide access to the Youtube main site.	* Current Topics page (click here)

Teaching speaking skills

Software	Activity	Goals
i-movie	One activity that I like to do with speaking and that I incorporate into lessons already is an activity where I take a TV commercial or part of a sitcom and take out the voice track. Then Ss, using the Mac software program i-movie, the Ss create their own scripts and record them and put them into the scenes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fluency * Accuracy
Garage-band	Ss make their own radio programs/podcasts on the computer using garage band. They can put in music, sound effects and voices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fluency * Accuracy * Group collaboration/cooperation * Pronunciation * Motivation
i-movie	Ss also write and produce their own movies, and edit them on computers. This provides listening and speaking practice.	
Software	Things I'd like to try...	Links
Dragon Speech	I would like to try programs that take Ss voices and put them into written form. However, these programs are still costly. They promise 99% accuracy, but they take a little set up time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Dragon Speech software (click here) * Youtube video (click here) * Dragon improves speech-recognition software (click here)
Hollywood High/ Where in the World is Carmen Santiago?	I would be interested in looking at simulations that create environments that make conversations more interesting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Hollywood High description (click here) by © 2003, Musselwhite & Maro, www.aacintervention.com * "Where in the World is Carmen Santiago (1996)?"(Wikipedia) Click here
Skype	I would like to get Ss onto synchronous speaking tasks that require them to use language, with speakers from all around the world (different Englishes). That would also include video conferencing.	

