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## How to Become a Better Reader and Thinker

The chances are that you are not as good a reader as you should be to do well in college. If so, it's not surprising. You live in a culture where people watch an average of *over seven hours of television every day!!!* All that passive viewing does not allow much time for reading. Reading is a skill that must be actively practiced. The simple fact is that people who do not read very often are not likely to be strong readers.

- How much TV do you guess you watch on an average day? \_\_\_\_\_

Another reason besides TV for not reading much is that you may have a lot of responsibilities. You may be going to school and working at the same time, and you may have a lot of family duties as well. Given a hectic schedule, you're not going to have much time to read. When you have free time, you're exhausted, and it's easier to turn on the TV than to open up a book.

- Do you do any regular reading (for example, a daily newspaper, weekly magazines, occasional novels)? \_\_\_\_\_
- When are you most likely to do your reading? \_\_\_\_\_

A third reason for not reading is that school may have caused you to associate reading with worksheets and drills and book reports and test scores. Experts agree that many schools have not done a good job of helping students discover the pleasures and rewards of reading. If reading was an unpleasant experience in school, you may have concluded that reading in general is not for you.

- Do you think that school made you dislike reading, rather than enjoy it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Here are three final questions to ask yourself:

- Do you feel that perhaps you don't need a reading course, since you "already know how to read"? \_\_\_\_\_
- If you had a choice, would you be taking a reading course? (It's okay to be honest.) \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you think that a bit of speed reading may be all you need? \_\_\_\_\_

Chances are that you don't need to read *faster* as much as you need to read *smarter*. And it's a safe bet that if you don't read much, you can benefit enormously from the reading course in which you are using this book.

One goal of the book is to help you become a better reader. You will learn and practice ten key reading comprehension skills. As a result, you'll be better able to read and understand the many materials in your other college courses. The skills in this book have direct and practical value: they can help you perform better and more quickly—giving you an edge for success—in all of your college work.

The book is also concerned with helping you become a stronger thinker, a person able not just to understand what is read but to analyze and evaluate it as well. In fact, reading and thinking are closely related skills, and practice in thoughtful reading will also strengthen your ability to think clearly and logically. To find out just how the book will help you achieve these goals, read the next several pages and do the brief activities as well. The activities are easily completed and will give you a quick, helpful overview of the book.

## HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book is organized into four main parts:

### Introduction (pages 1–30)

In addition to this chapter, which will give you a good sense of the book, there are two other parts to the introduction, "Getting Off to a Strong Start" and "One Reader's Story." "Getting Off to a Strong Start" describes several essentials for success in school. In the space provided below, write the essential that is presented on pages 3–5:

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The next essential for success, "Key Study Skills," presents four tips that can make you a better student. If I had time to give just four tips to incoming

college students based on my thirty years of teaching experience, these are the things I would say. In the space below, write in the first and second of these tips, described on pages 5–7:

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The last essential for school success is to increase your involvement with reading. Regular reading is seen as the very heart of education for three reasons. Turn to pages 11–12 to complete the list of reasons:

1. Reading provides language power.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Reading creates human power.

## Part I: Ten Steps to Building College Reading Skills (pages 31–418)

To help you become a more effective reader and thinker, this book presents a series of ten key reading skills. They are listed in the table of contents on pages v and vi. Turn to those pages to fill in the skills missing below:

- 1 Dictionary Use
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Main Ideas
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Locations of Main Ideas
- 6 Relationships I
- 7 Relationships II
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 Implied Main Ideas
- 10 The Basics of Argument

Each chapter is developed in the same way.

**First of all**, clear explanations and examples help you *understand* each skill. Practices then give you the “hands-on” experience needed to learn the skill.

- How many practices are there for the third chapter, “Main Ideas” (pages 109–136)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Closing each chapter** are four review tests. The first review test provides a check of the information presented in the chapter.

- On which page is the first review test for “Main Ideas”? \_\_\_\_\_

The second and third review tests consist of activities that help you practice the skill learned in the chapter.

- On which pages are Review Tests 2 and 3 for “Main Ideas”? \_\_\_\_\_

The fourth review test consists of a story, essay, or textbook selection that both gets you reading and gives you practice in the skill learned in the chapter as well as skills learned in previous chapters.

- What is the title of the reading selection in the “Main Ideas” chapter?

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**Following each chapter** are six mastery tests that gradually increase in difficulty.

- On what pages are the mastery tests for the “Main Ideas” chapter? \_\_\_\_\_

The tests are on tear-out pages and so can be easily removed and handed in to your instructor. So that you can track your progress, there is a score box at the top of each test. Your score can also be entered into the “Reading Performance Chart” on the inside back cover of the book.

## Part II: Ten Reading Selections (pages 419–516)

The ten reading selections that make up Part II are followed by activities that give you practice in all of the skills studied in Part I. Each reading begins in the same way. Look, for example, at “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids?” which starts on page 421. What are the headings of the two sections that come before the reading itself?

- \_\_\_\_\_

Note that the vocabulary words in “Words to Watch” are followed by the numbers of the paragraphs in which the words appear. Look at the first page of “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids” and explain how each vocabulary word is marked in the reading itself.

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## Activities Following Each Reading Selection

After each selection, there are four kinds of activities to improve the reading and thinking skills you learned in Part I of the book.

- 1 The first activity consists of **vocabulary questions**—questions involving vocabulary in context as well as “Words to Watch.”
  - Look at the vocabulary questions for “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids?” on pages 423–424. The first five questions deal with understanding vocabulary in context. How many questions then help you learn words taken from “Words to Watch”? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 The second activity consists of **reading comprehension questions**—questions involving vocabulary in context, main ideas (including the central point and implied main ideas), supporting details, relationships, and inferences.
  - Look at the questions for “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids?” on pages 425–426. Note that the questions are labeled so you know what skill you are practicing in each case. How many questions deal with the central point and main ideas? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The third activity involves **outlining, mapping, or summarizing**. Each of these activities will sharpen your ability to get to the heart of a piece and to think logically and clearly about what you read.
  - What kind of activity is provided for “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids?” on page 427? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What kind of activity is provided for the reading titled “The Storyteller” on pages 436–437? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What kind of activity is provided for the reading titled “Disaster and Friendship” on page 446? \_\_\_\_\_

Note that a **map**, or diagram, is a highly visual way of organizing material. Like an outline, it shows at a glance the main parts of a selection.
- 4 The fourth activity consists of **discussion questions**. These questions provide a chance for you to deepen your understanding of each selection.
  - How many discussion questions are there for “Winners, Losers, or Just Kids?” (page 428)—and indeed for every other reading? \_\_\_\_\_

### Part III: Active Reading (pages 517–558)

This part of the book gives you tips on becoming an active reader and then provides a series of combined-skills tests that help you practice a number of the skills in the book.

- How many tips are provided on page 520 for becoming an active rather than a passive reader? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many “Combined-Skills Tests” are there on pages 527–558? \_\_\_\_\_

These tests are made up of short passages that closely resemble the ones typically found in standardized tests.

### Appendixes (pages 559–594)

Among the sections in the “Appendixes” are “Three Additional Readings” — short textbook selections that your instructor may assign for note-taking practice.

- What is the topic of the first selection (pages 561–563)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Another section, “Writing Assignments,” presents writing assignments for all twenty of the reading selections in the book. Reading and writing are closely connected skills, and writing practice will improve your ability to read closely and to think carefully.

- How many assignments are offered for each reading? \_\_\_\_\_

Other parts of the appendixes include a limited answer key, an index, and a reading performance chart.

## HELPFUL FEATURES OF THE BOOK

- 1 The book centers on *what you really need to know* to become a better reader and thinker. It presents key comprehension skills and explains the most important points about each one.
- 2 The book gives you *lots of practice*. We seldom learn a skill only by hearing or reading about it; we make it part of us by repeated practice.

There are, then, numerous activities in the text. They are not “busywork” but carefully designed materials that should help you truly learn each skill.

Notice that after you learn each skill in Part I, you progress to review tests and mastery tests that enable you to apply the skill. And as you move from one skill to the next, the reading selections help you practice and reinforce the skills already learned.

- 3 The selections throughout the book are *lively and appealing*. Dull and unvaried readings work against learning, so subjects have been carefully chosen for their high interest level. Almost all of the selections here are good examples of how what we read can capture our attention. For instance, begin “All the Good Things” on page 90 and try not to be moved by the conclusion. Or read the timeless short story by Saki on pages 429–432. Or look at the textbook selection on pages 497–501, which is full of helpful information about understanding and controlling one’s feelings.
- 4 The readings include nine selections from college textbooks. Therefore, you will be practicing on materials very much like those in your other courses. Doing so will increase your chances of transferring what you learn in your reading class to your other college courses.

## HOW TO USE THE BOOK

- 1 A good way to proceed is to read and review the explanations and examples in a given chapter in Part I until you feel you understand the ideas presented. Then carefully work through the practices. As you finish each one, check your answers with the “Limited Answer Key” that starts on page 583.

For your own sake, *don’t just copy in the answers without trying to do the practices!* The only way to learn a skill is to practice it first and then use the answer key to give yourself feedback. Also, take whatever time is needed to figure out just why you got some answers wrong. By using the answer key to help teach yourself the skills, you will prepare yourself for the review and mastery tests at the end of each chapter as well as the other reading tests in the book. Your instructor can supply you with answers to those tests.

If you have trouble catching on to a particular skill, stick with it. In time, you will learn each of the ten skills.

- 2 Read the selections first with the intent of simply enjoying them. There will be time afterward for rereading each selection and using it to develop your comprehension skills.
- 3 Keep track of your progress. Fill in the charts at the end of each chapter in Part I and each reading in Part II. And in the “Reading Performance Chart” on the inside back cover, enter your scores for all of the review and mastery tests as well as the reading selections. These scores can give you a good view of your overall performance as you work through the book.

In summary, *Ten Steps to Building College Reading Skills, Fourth Edition*, has been designed to interest and benefit you as much as possible. Its format is straightforward, its explanations are clear, its readings are appealing, and its many practices will help you learn through doing. *It is a book that has been created to reward effort*, and if you provide that effort, you will make yourself a better reader and a stronger thinker. I wish you success.

**John Langan**