3 Designing the reading course

> In language teaching, our methods and techniques have
> often failed to produce effective learning, however
> sound they may have appeared in theory. To discover
> why, we must study the learner.
> – William Littlewood (1984: 1)

Many decisions and preparations need to be made before teachers actually step into the classroom. In this chapter we look at how to decide what to teach in an L2/FL reading course, or the course goals; how to structure the course in order to reach those goals, or the approach; and what considerations to keep in mind in selecting texts. The chapter closes with some initial considerations for a course evaluation plan and final course grade determination. The issues of assessment and evaluation are taken up again in Chapter 9.

Course goals

The most important information that teachers must have as they start to design a reading course is the **goals for the course** – the reading abilities that students should develop during the course. Teachers then use the goals to guide them as they decide about the structure of the course and about appropriate ways to evaluate the students' performance and thus the course's effectiveness. Goals are usually stated in a broad, general manner; they need not be long or complicated.

Exercise 3.1   Building your knowledge

Go back to the Introduction of this book and locate the statements that we used as our general goals for our students (you) in planning this book. How many are there? What are they?

Before developing reading goals, it is necessary to assess the needs of the students. J. D. Brown (1995: 37–8) identifies four groups that may be included in a needs analysis: the target group (those about whom information will be gathered), the audience (those using the information collected), the needs analysts (those gathering the information), and a resource group (those who provide further information about the target group). Although

35

several groups may participate in determining the reading goals for a
course, fundamentally, course goals must arise directly from students'
needs, interests, and abilities.

Students' needs

Before goals can be written, teachers must consider what students will do
with their L2 reading abilities. For instance, do they need to be able to read
textbooks on other subjects, such as science or medicine? Do they need to
be able to read newspapers or magazines? Do they need to be able to read
literature? Do they need to be able to read schedules or forms? Do they
need to be able to read letters or personal notes? In short, teachers should
know why they are teaching reading to a particular group of students.

Because course goals need to be established well in advance of the first
class meeting so that materials can be selected and course designs can be
made, student needs as defined by teachers, administrators, and other
groups are usually given greater weight than the needs defined by the
students themselves. In addition, teachers are often more knowledgeable
about what lies ahead for students academically than the students them-
selves are. However, since students who are involved in their own learning
are better learners, teachers should and can include them in the process.
Teachers always have some degree of flexibility to adjust and shape a
course as it progresses. If feedback from students is collected throughout a
course, the teacher can adjust the goals and activities selected to provide
students with a meaningful and relevant course.

The most reliable way of finding out what students think they need is to
ask them. A variety of ways can be used to collect information: question-
naires, individual interviews or oral reports, observations of small group
discussions, and questions on quizzes or tests, to name a few.

One easy and useful way to collect information is a brief survey. **Sur-
veys** usually consist of questions for students to answer briefly or an in-
complete sentence that students must then finish. Surveys do not need to be
long and complex in order to provide useful information. The level of
language should vary according to the students' L2 proficiency. If students
share a common L1, the survey could be done in that language for students
at beginning and low levels. The following is an example of a survey that
could be used with students at a low level of ESL/EFL proficiency.

1. Do you read anything in English now?
   a. If "yes," what do you read and why?
   b. If "no," what are you interested in reading in English?

2. What English reading materials are available to you?

Even if this survey were to come back with the answers "1. No 2. I don't
know," a teacher would learn that this student did not have any established
reasons for reading in English and had no awareness of what he might find
to read in English. One of the first tasks this teacher faces is to build *with
the student* a need or an interest to read materials in the L2/FL.

Assuming this response was typical for the class, an appropriate first
assignment for these students might be to check local newsstands, book-
stores, and libraries to see what is available in the L2/FL and where it can
be found. This activity should produce some interest and excitement if the
students are allowed to select texts according to their own interests. At this
point the class is on its way to establishing its own purposes for reading. On
the other hand, if students were to answer "Yes" to the survey questions, the
teacher could begin immediately to build interest by asking students to
elaborate on their needs, interests, and experiences. It is important that
teachers involve students in establishing purposes for reading so that they
understand why they are in a reading class and so that they make a genuine
commitment to the reasons for reading.

By taking into account both teacher-perceived and student-contributed
needs when planning reading goals, teachers and students work together to
build a learning environment that is relevant to both. This environment
optimizes the opportunity for learning. The more invested and involved
students are in their learning, the more responsibility they will take for their
learning.

Courses in which the students have some degree of control over what
goes on in the course and how it occurs are considered to be **student-
centered.** Courses in which the teacher has complete control are **teacher-
centered.** Giving students some control over their learning process has
many benefits: It makes them feel confident; it puts some of the decision
making in their hands; it puts the responsibility for learning in their hands;
and over the long term it builds independence and self-reliance so that they
can read on their own without being dependent on teacher direction and
supervision. It activates the students' own learning spirals.

Once the purposes for teaching reading are established, teachers can then
begin to formulate goals for the reading course. **Goals** are broad, general
statements about what students will achieve during the course. If a goal is
expressed in specific terms, it is an **objective.** Objectives are specifically
stated aims that teachers use in creating individual lesson plans. We exam-
ine objectives in more detail in Chapter 4.

Exercise 3.2   Building your knowledge

Read the following course description. Which sentences seem to state the goals for the students in this course? Identify three goals. Write them in your Teaching Portfolio.

Reading Course Description

The purpose of this 15-week course was to develop the students' ability and confidence to read a variety of real, nonsimplified texts in their L2/FL: academic textbooks, informative magazines, and short fiction stories. Academic texts were read for total comprehension while informational and fictional texts were read to whatever degree of comprehension satisfied the individual student. Throughout the course we did about a chapter a week in the textbook, which was a collection of chapters from various kinds of academic textbooks. There were reading exercises before, during, and after each reading text. Strategies for approaching the content of a text were developed. Vocabulary was dealt with in matching and paraphrase exercises at the end of the reading. Particularly complex grammar structures were examined one by one with opportunities for students to select their own sentences for class dissection. Each student completed the exercises for each chapter in the textbook, which were then checked either by the teacher or by the students in small groups.

In addition, students were assigned to a *Newsweek* reading group that met each week for the first 7 weeks of the course. At the beginning of the week they met to decide which article the group would read that week. Then they each read the article at home. At the second meeting, they again met with their group for about 15 minutes to discuss the article and ask any questions that they wished of the teacher. By the end of the week each student had to turn in a brief report (less than a handwritten page) to the teacher stating the main ideas of the article. These reports were read by the teacher for general comprehension, and no grammar or vocabulary was corrected. The teacher wrote responses on the reports that commented on personal experience, gave the teacher's opinions on the subject, etc. After half a term of this, the students were free to find their own magazines in the library. Each student read and wrote a report on his own, as an individual, turning in a copy of the article that he read along with his report.

Once every two weeks, the teacher brought in several copies of each of five different short stories and gave a brief summary of each story to the students at the beginning of class. Students could then choose which story they wanted to read at home. After they had read it, students were asked to make a brief oral summary on an audio cassette of what happened in the story and what their reaction to the story was. Midterm and final exams were given and the course grade was based on the results of those tests plus whether each student had completed the required number of written and oral reports.

Students' interests

We started this chapter by talking about needs (both teacher-perceived and student-contributed), but the reading survey introduced the issue of students' interests. It is possible that very few students have needs that motivate them to read in the L2/FL. However, they probably all have interests that could be used to propel them into reading in the L2/FL.

STUDENT NARRATIVE

When I was in college in my country, I tried to read fashion magazines, Vogue, Cosmopolitan. *They had a lot of information on beauty and skin care. I read an article, "Steps on How to Take Care of Your Skin." I bought a mask and some creams. Actually, my mother gave me something, like Clinique – with instructions. I wanted to know what to do but we couldn't understand the instructions! I still read those magazines here in the U.S.*

– Sung Hee Choi, Korea

Some students may have an established personal interest in certain topics and may like to read anything and everything that they can find on those topics. They probably already know a lot about the topic, but they want to know more. Thus a person who is interested in space exploration will automatically seek out articles on this topic when scanning the newspaper or perusing a magazine.

Another reason students are interested in certain topics is that the topic touches their lives in a personal way. An example of this is the interest that teenagers take in popular music and performers. They may become interested in that topic because their social peers are interested. They want to know what others around them know.

Another type of interest stems from the relevance a topic has to the larger community within which an individual functions. Americans have become focused on the connection between health and environment in recent decades as a result of being bombarded with information via magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and community meetings. To some degree readers' interest in this topic has been created for them. Readers have been made aware of issues that they might not choose to investigate on their own; thus, they recognize the need to become informed. An example would be the person who decides to give up smoking cigarettes because details of its harmful effects have been made available to the public.

The three types of interest (individual, peer group, community group) described in the preceding examples will occur to different degrees in different people. Degree of interest is an important factor in reading motivation. The more interested people are, the more they will persevere in

reading. Intense interest motivates people to read materials that are beyond
their range of language proficiency. It is important that students have some
degree of interest in the materials they read.

Just as peer groups and communities can create interest on the part of
readers, teachers, too, can create interest on the part of students. By using a
number of activities and techniques (discussed in Chapter 4), teachers can
create or heighten student interest in a topic before they read. By exposing
students to new topics or new ideas about old topics, teachers can expand
the bases of students' knowledge. Sometimes students are not interested in
a topic until they know something about it.

STUDENT NARRATIVE

*When I was in my country, I was aware that AIDS existed, but I didn't know
much about it because there just isn't any information about it in public places.
Since I took this course, I've learned a lot about it, especially from the readings
I found. I'm really quite interested in it because it's a big problem and
everybody needs to know about it. I went to the Art Fair last week and there
was a lady there giving out information about it.*

– Sung Hee Choi, Korea

Other times students may know something about the topic and think that
they are not interested in it until prereading work in class has piqued their
curiosity in some way. Being skilled at creating and heightening interest
enables teachers to guide students toward topics that are important but that
would not normally interest them.

A simple survey can be used to find out what topics students are inter-
ested in.

Exercise 3.3   Building your knowledge

Devise a simple survey that will investigate what topics your students might
like to read about. Keep in mind that people are more likely to answer
surveys when they can just check and circle answers. Of course, there
should always be an opportunity for those who are inclined to give you their
full opinion in writing to do so.

Surveys should be done periodically throughout the course to check on
students' opinions about other things as well, such as quantity of work and
techniques being used. They do not always need to be written – information
can be collected orally as well.

TEACHER NARRATIVE

*During the first meeting of an academically oriented ESL reading class for
college students, I asked the students to introduce themselves and state what*

*kind of books they read for pleasure in their native language. Almost half of the
class did not read any books for pleasure at all! Since one of the goals of the
course was for them to read unsimplified short stories in English that they had
to go to the library and find themselves, I was apprehensive about how they
would receive this assignment. On the basis of this informal, first-day, oral
survey I decided to start them off on "pleasure" readings by providing them
with short stories that I knew were short, humorous, and well within their
language proficiency range. I continued to provide short stories until halfway
through the term, when my mid-course survey on whether they wanted "more of,
the same amount of, or less of" each type of reading showed that almost all of
them felt the amount of short stories they were reading was "OK." From that
point on, I sent them to the library to find and select their own short stories.*

–– Brenda Millett, U.S.A.

In addition to providing important information, opinion surveys rein-
force the idea that students have some responsibility for their own learning.
Using them throughout the course allows the monitoring of student thought
on these matters as the course progresses. Students become more involved
in the process when given the invitation (and the encouragement) to do so.

Students' language proficiency

The phrases "within their language proficiency range" or "beyond their
language proficiency range" have specific meaning in a reading context.
When students can understand enough of the text they are reading to make
general sense of the message, they are reading **within their language
proficiency range.** This means they may not know all of the facts and
details, but they do understand the general topic, most of the main ideas,
and several details.

When students try to read **beyond their language proficiency level,**
they are overwhelmed. When a great deal of the vocabulary they are read-
ing is unknown to them, they become frustrated. If the grammar structures
of several consecutive sentences are long and complex, they get tired or
lost, or both. If the topic written about is outside of their experience or base
of knowledge, they are adrift on an unknown sea. When they have these
feelings while reading, they may stop reading because they cannot under-
stand the meaning of the text enough to satisfy their expectations, needs, or
interests.

What degree of comprehension is necessary to motivate readers to read
on? There is no fixed answer to this question. Other factors besides com-
prehension contribute to motivation. Readers who are very knowledgeable
about the topic seem to tolerate a higher amount of unknown vocabulary
and grammar because they have enough background knowledge of the

topic to support their comprehension. Thus, those with more tolerance can read in the higher end of their range with more comfort than those with less tolerance can. Those with less topic knowledge will probably feel more comfortable when they are reading in the lower end of their range.

The parameters of students' language proficiency range are likely to vary even within one class. If students are placed in classes by their proficiency levels as demonstrated by tests, there should be a fair amount of overlap among their ranges. If, however, students are placed in a class because they have already completed one year of L2/FL study or they are in a certain grade, it is possible, even likely, that there will be greater differences among their ranges. An L2/FL classroom of this type is known as a multi-level classroom. It is a great challenge for teachers because it requires multiple lesson plans and a range of materials to address all the students. Indeed, different levels may need to study different skills at a given time. Planning for and teaching multilevel classes greatly increase the teacher's workload.

Approaches to teaching reading

Once course goals have been written, reading teachers need to decide what approach they will use to achieve their goals. **Approach** "refers to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 16). Take a moment to clarify your own thoughts on how students improve reading in an L2/FL.

Exercise 3.4   Building your knowledge

1. Put a check in front of the sentences you agree with:
____ Students' L2/FL reading ability will improve greatly if they will read more than four texts a week.
____ Every L2/FL text needs to be completely and fully understood in order for students' reading comprehension to improve.
____ L2/FL reading ability improves when students read for real reasons: to get information to use for an argument, a report, to find out what is going on in the world.
____ Teachers know best which texts are appropriate for improving their students' reading.
____ Reading to get the general idea of an article or just the main ideas is sufficient to improve reading skills.
____ The quantity of reading is not as important as the quality of the comprehension of the text.
____ L2/FL readers should be able to select the texts that they read.

____ Doing several language and comprehension exercises at the end of each reading greatly improves L2/FL reading ability.

2. Check your answers with those of your classmates. Discuss what each phrase you checked would mean for your class and the materials that you would need in order to teach reading that way. For example, if you selected the first sentence above, you might conclude that your students would need to read something for every class period, that they would need to read outside of class, that you would probably need more reading texts than those provided in a textbook, that you would not be able to require complete comprehension of each text read because there would not be enough time for them to read each text carefully enough to understand everything, and so on.

If you checked the first, third, fifth, and seventh statements and only those, you believe in a totally extensive approach to teaching reading. If you checked all the even-numbered statements and no others, you believe in a totally intensive approach. If you checked some of both, you probably feel most comfortable using activities that include both extensive and intensive approaches in your reading course.

An extensive approach

An **extensive approach** to teaching reading is based on the belief that when students read for general comprehension large quantities of texts of their own choosing, their ability to read will consequently improve. The emphasis in extensive reading courses is to use reading as a *means* to an end. In other words, reading is used to accomplish something else, such as a written summary, a written report, an oral report, a group discussion, a debate. In this type of course, students are usually given more freedom to choose reading materials that interest them and more responsibility in finding materials within their language proficiency range. The texts that they read may be completely of their own selection or to some extent selected by the teacher.

In an extensive reading course almost all of the reading is done outside of class, without peer support or teacher aid. The text is always to be read for comprehension of main ideas, not of every detail and word. The quantity of reading required of students each week prevents them from reading every text in depth, or from translating every text into their L1. Students are frequently asked to read more than one text on the same topic. The more texts they read on the same topic, the more they will understand because they will bring more background knowledge to each new text they read. Extensive readings are not generally used to teach or practice specific reading strategies or skills. Since students read authentic materials, the texts do not have accompanying reading exercises.

Since the idea of designing an entire reading course according to the extensive approach is still relatively uncommon, we asked a teacher who has taught such a course to write about her observations. Although she was an experienced L2/FL teacher, the extensive approach was a new experience for her.

TEACHER NARRATIVE

I've used the extensive reading approach two consecutive terms with a group of about 20 advanced ESL readers who would continue on to take regular college classes in an American university. Basically, the approach appeals to me for two reasons: It places the responsibility for developing their reading ability squarely on the shoulders of the students and it pushes them to read and make sense of a larger quantity of reading material than intensive ESL reading classes do. I sometimes feel that students are not asked to do the amount of reading that they will have to do in academic classes and thus they are not well prepared to do what they will need to do after they leave this class. An extensive approach also allows the students a greater degree of choice regarding which topics they read, and it encourages them to be more aware of what's available to be read in their surroundings.

This approach requires the teacher to be organized and stay current with the students' reading reports on a weekly or biweekly basis. I had to read, or skim, every text that each student read during the week in order to be able to evaluate their short written report of each text. Sometimes different students selected the same text and each week some students read short articles while others read long ones. However, it's a lot of work and if you get behind, it's impossible to catch up. Occasionally, I had to encourage students to read texts from a different source – one student continually read articles from the student newspaper. I always try to guide them a little towards different and more challenging materials to stretch them a bit. I also had to encourage some students to read texts whose language level was more appropriate to their range. I had one student who wanted to read the novel Shogun *in English, because he had read it in his native language! We negotiated and settled on him reading one long chapter. And, of course, there were a few students who couldn't quite organize or discipline themselves to meet deadlines. Students need to learn responsibility and this approach requires it, whereas in other approaches, the responsibility lies more with the teacher.*

The data I collected from students on their responses to this approach told me they were positive about the choice factor but not about the reading load. Because I saw each student individually for student conferences throughout the term, I got a fair amount of anecdotal feedback as well. I saw some of them the following term around campus, and they told me that they now understood why I had required them to read so much. Through the term I saw them grow in confidence as they successfully handled the work.

– Cathy Day, U.S.A

An intensive approach

In an **intensive approach** to reading – which currently reigns in most L2/FL classrooms and books – reading the text is treated as an end in itself. Each text is read carefully and thoroughly for maximum comprehension. Teachers provide direction and help before, sometimes during, and after reading. Students do many exercises that require them to work in depth with various selected aspects of the text. Exercises can cover a broad range of reading skills:

- Looking at different levels of comprehension (main ideas vs. details)
- Understanding what is implied versus what is stated
- Discussing what inferences a reader can reasonably make
- Determining the order in which information is presented and its effect on the message
- Identifying words that connect one idea to another
- Identifying words that signal movement from one section to another
- Noting which words indicate authors' certainty about the information presented

Exercise 3.5   Building your knowledge

Now that you have an understanding of the activities associated with both approaches, look at the excerpts from the tables of contents from two different advanced ESOL reading textbooks below. One exhibits an extensive approach, the other an intensive approach. Which is which?

Exercise 3.6   Building your knowledge

The complete tables of contents from each textbook are in Appendices A and B of this chapter. Examine each one carefully; make a list of the types of activities that each book asks the students to do.

It is possible – and common – to use a combination of both approaches in a reading course. For example, teachers who use a mostly intensive approach to teaching reading may ask students to read texts of their own selection and write a report on them, or to read something in the newspaper each week and report orally on it at the beginning of the class. Teachers who use a mostly extensive approach may have all the students read the same teacher-supplied texts from time to time so that they can discuss the same topic together or can learn how to write a report or make an outline.

Exercise 3.7   Building your knowledge

1. Reread the course description in Exercise 3.2. Examine which parts exhibit an extensive approach and which parts exhibit an intensive approach. Discuss your answers with your classmates.
2. What changes could be made in the course to make it (1) more extensive in nature? (2) more intensive in nature?

All of the examples given here of extensive and intensive reading courses assume a very high level of L2/FL proficiency. It is easier to use an extensive approach when the students have easy access to L2/FL texts in the culture at large. It is, however, possible to design an extensive reading course for students at intermediate or high intermediate levels of L2/FL proficiency; it requires a specialized library in the students' classroom, or the school, or the community, and some adjustment in the follow-up tasks that students do. Students need to have access to texts that are within their language proficiency range – texts that they can understand to a great degree without extensive use of a dictionary. In order to summarize the texts, they need to have a reasonable degree of comprehension. If students are asked to read texts beyond their language proficiency range, then the follow-up tasks for which they are reading should be adjusted to demand less of their comprehension – for example, students could be asked to present only the gist of the article or one prominent piece of information.

Content-based instruction (CBI) is a recent development in course designs. The approach underlying this design is the belief that students can improve their L2 language skills, including reading ability, while studying

content material (e.g., texts on history, biology, computers, etc.). This
course design is not discussed further in this book as the reading activities
that teachers might select to use in the CBI classroom are the same as those
used in the intensive reading course. The difference is that the CBI class-
room focuses more attention on systematically presenting the content than
the language skills (see Brinton, Snow, & Wesche 1989; Cantoni-Harvey
1987).

Selecting appropriate materials

When the course goals have been written and the dominant approach
decided, the next task facing the teacher is to select appropriate materials.
They may be expository, narrative, fiction – whatever type is necessary, as
long as they fulfill course goals. Teachers using a mostly extensive ap-
proach in the reading course need to make sure that students have a readily
available and sufficiently large supply of texts at their levels of language
proficiency. Those using an intensive approach need to choose reading
textbooks that provide the types of readings and reading skills they wish to
cover in the course. Teachers using a mixed approach need to have both
kinds of materials on hand.

Fiction or nonfiction texts?

The technical differences between fiction and nonfiction are not central to
our purposes here. We can be content with the accepted distinction that
nonfiction centers on the presentation of information. **Fiction,** on the other
hand, centers on telling a story, a sequence of imagined events involving
(usually) human characters whose emotional, physical, psychological, and
spiritual experiences in life create empathy or response in the reader. Peo-
ple read informational texts, such as newspapers, magazines, instructional
manuals, and reports, on a regular basis. Reading such texts is a life skill,
whereas the need to read such nonfiction texts as textbooks and scholarly
articles may end when formal education is finished. In contrast, texts that
relate stories may not be a part of people's regular reading. Fiction can
serve two important functions in the L2/FL classroom: to teach language
and to introduce or reinforce human (social, cultural, political, emotional,
economic, etc.) themes and issues in the classroom.

What is central to the role of L2/FL reading teachers is that these two
types of texts often demand different kinds of focus, involving different

teaching methods. Nonfiction works demand that readers understand the main points of the information the author is presenting. Fiction demands that readers follow the sequence of events, understand what happened to each person, understand the personalities (problems, emotions, ideas) of the main characters, and see what message or theme the author is illustrating through the people and events in the work. The way language is manipulated, while often sophisticated and subtle in both nonfiction and fiction, presents a wider range of challenges in fiction. (See Chapter 8 for further discussion on the use of literary texts in the L2/FL classroom.)

Authentic or modified texts?

There is an ongoing debate in the L2/FL profession about whether or not reading materials should be authentic. **Materials** in this case refers not only to types of texts found in magazines and books, but also to any item from everyday life that conveys meaning through written language, such as schedules, application forms, billboards, advertisements, labels, and so on. The texts in this latter category are generally referred to as **realia. Authentic materials** are taken directly from L1 sources and are not changed in any way before they are used in the classroom. Articles or advertisements from an L2/FL newspaper and train schedules are examples of authentic materials.

When a teacher creates a menu rather than using a real menu from a restaurant, the class is using simulated authentic materials that mimic the content, format, and language of authentic realia and are created solely for use in the L2/FL classroom. The teacher-created menu may not be quite as colloquial or complex as an authentic menu would be. The term **modified** is generally used to describe traditional text materials in which the language of the text and sometimes the cultural references have been changed so that L2/FL students can more readily comprehend them. Texts can be modified in several ways:

- The words used can be changed to more frequent, general usage vocabulary.
- The grammar structures of the sentences can be modified to be less complex than they are in the original.
- Transitions can be added so that the relationship between the ideas in each clause is made explicit throughout the text.
- Additional background or cultural information can be put into the text so that readers can have more access to what is being discussed.

The degree of text modification can vary greatly. In other words, just a few items in a text can be modified (a few words or idioms), or the complete text can be rewritten. In the latter case, the general message and usually the organization of the information in the text is kept, but the language (grammar and vocabulary) and, perhaps, the organization of the information is changed.

Exercise 3.8   Building your knowledge

Appendices C and D contain two different versions of a literary text, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Read each one and note what changes have been made in the modified version. Look for two or three specific examples of each of the four ways mentioned previously to alter text. See if you can add some items to the list of differences. (*Hint:* Find a partner to do this activity. One of you reads the first sentence of the authentic text and the other reads the sentence(s) from the modified text that convey the same information. Continue in this way until you have a solid understanding of the differences.)

The advantage and purpose of modifying texts is to allow students whose L2/FL proficiency is below that of the original text to read the modified text with sufficient understanding to comprehend the message.

Making texts appropriate to the level of the reader is a common phenomenon in materials produced for L1 readers as well. Materials for native children and young adults in the United States are written in modified English that is not only appropriate to their level of language mastery but to their degree of mental development. Audience factors other than age also play a role; consider the differences in language between texts found in *Reader's Digest* and *Scientific American,* or between a university freshman's psychology textbook and a graduate student's psychology textbook.

What is the place of authentic materials in the L2/FL reading classroom? The answer to this question is presently being explored. There has been a trend in recent years to introduce authentic materials into L2/FL reading classes at every proficiency level. This lets students know what is available to be read and demonstrates to them that even though they cannot yet read the material in its entirety, they can comprehend the text on some level by using their reading skills. The introduction of authentic texts in even low-level classes makes the purpose for reading real in a way that no modified texts can. Thus, using them to some extent in both the L2 and FL settings is useful. Mastering even a small degree of comprehension of authentic materials gives students confidence in dealing with reading for real purposes.

Types of textbooks

The most common type of L2/FL textbook teaches reading with a mixture
of intensive and extensive approaches and contains both informational and
story/narrative texts written in modified language. Each text has accom-
panying exercises that develop the use of reading strategies, vocabulary,
and sometimes grammar comprehension. For a more detailed description of
types of reading textbooks, consult Appendix E.

Evaluation and final course grade

We would be remiss in talking about the process of designing a reading
course if we did not address the issue of evaluating students' performances
and determining course grades. Teachers need to know how they will
determine whether the course goals have been met. Therefore, they need to
decide how they will evaluate their students' reading performances, when
they will do so, and how those evaluations will figure into the students'
final course grades.

   To do this, they will start with the course goals and then convert them
into statements that can be measured in some specified way. For example,
one course goal might be for students to be able to read informational texts
within their L2/FL proficiency range and comprehend the topic and most of
the main ideas presented in the article. Thus, **an evaluative outcome
statement** for this particular goal might read: "Students will be able to read
an informational text on a topic of general interest within their L2/FL
proficiency range under timed conditions and correctly identify the topic
and 80 percent of its main ideas with 75 percent accuracy." One could add
"in three out of five texts" or "in two out of three texts," or "in a text of
approximately 500 words in 30 minutes," and so on. Another evaluative
outcome statement might read: "Each student will read five informational
texts of his choice each week of the term and submit on time a written
report on each text that states the topic and contains 80 percent of the main
ideas of each article." Whatever teachers decide upon as evidence of stu-
dents' achievement should be written in specific, measurable ways so that
(1) it will be clear whether or not students have achieved that goal and (2)
these outcome goals can be used to measure students' achievement in the
same course the next time it is taught. Precision in stating how goals will be
measured allows for more consistency in evaluation (Chapter 9 deals more
thoroughly with evaluation and assessment).

   Teachers need to think about the types of evaluative tasks that will

comprise the final course grade. Tests are one option. If a teacher has
decided that she is going to use only tests to determine if course goals and
evaluative outcome statements have been met, then the entire course grade
will depend upon test scores. If, however, other evaluative tasks are used
during the course, those too should be factored into the final course grade.
In addition to test scores and grades on nontest work, many teachers also
like to factor student preparation (including homework) and class participa-
tion into the calculations of the final course grades. Table 3.1 shows some
typical distributions for determining the final course grade in three different
courses. There is great variety in the composition of final course grades,
depending upon course goals and the course approach.

Table 3.1   Sample distributions for final course grades

	Course 1	*Course 2*	*Course 3*
Quizzes	10		10
Reading tests	60	30	
Book report	20		10
Homework	10		
Reading reports		30	60
Final exam		20	
Reading journal		10	20
Preparation and participation		10	
Totals	100%	100%	100%

Exercise 3.9   Building your knowledge

Which final course grade distribution would be appropriate for an extensive
reading approach, an intensive reading approach, and a combination of the
two? What are some other breakdowns that reading teachers might use for a
given approach? Why were they chosen?

The designing of a reading course is a time-consuming, but important,
first step in teaching reading; the decisions teachers make at this point will
establish the framework within which they and their students will work for
the duration of the course. It is crucial that students invest in the goals of the
course and in the means for meeting those goals. If teachers and students
use materials that match their stated aims, the work of teaching and learning
is greatly facilitated. Both teachers and students understand where they are
going, how they are traveling, what instruments they are using for the trip,
and whether they reach their destination.

Expanding your knowledge

1. Think of a time when your interest in a topic motivated you to seek out
   information about it. What did you do (that was out of the ordinary) to
   find or to read that information? Was the information that you found
   within your reading range? If not, what did you do?
2. Using the Reading Course Description in Exercise 3.2, devise a survey
   to be completed by your students at mid-course. You want to see how
   they are doing with the types of reading and assignments you have been
   giving.
3. Teachers who have previously taught the same course can draw on their
   knowledge about their former students. With these students in mind,
   they can begin to formulate goals for the current course. Write two
   major goals for a reading course based on this description of former
   students:

   The students in this course are mostly refugees and immigrants in an adult
   community education program in an English-speaking country. They study
   English two days a week for 2½ hours at each class meeting. Their language
   proficiency level is intermediate; they can make themselves understood but
   with some difficulty. They speak haltingly and with many grammatical errors
   and inappropriate vocabulary. Typically, some of these students are already
   working and the rest hope to find work soon. Some have children in the
   public school system. Some parts of their lives are usually conducted totally
   in their native language, while other parts must be conducted in English
   because the people they come in contact with speak only English. They are,
   of course, interested in keeping up with the news in their home countries.
   They also want to know what is going on in the community in which they
   live.

4. Interview two L2/FL reading teachers. First, get enough information
   about the students in their course to write a course description, like the
   one in Exercise 3.2. Then ask them what goals they established for their
   students. Were those goals adjusted as the course progressed? Was stu-
   dent input sought? If so, how was that input collected?

Chapter highlights

Designing a reading course that will further students' knowledge and abil-
ities demands that the course designer and the teacher keep many relevant
points in mind so that the students will learn in the best possible way.

1. *Course goals.* Designers and teachers need to formulate goals based on what they as teachers know about the students' abilities and future academic needs as well as what the students themselves know about their needs, interests, and abilities.
2. *Approaches to teaching reading.* Reading courses can be conducted in an extensive way (believing that reading great quantities will build skills), an intensive way (believing that instruction and practice in specific skills will build skills), or a combination thereof.
3. *Selecting appropriate materials.* Teachers should be aware of what type of reading textbooks they are using so that they can use their texts in a manner that fits their beliefs about learning to read. Major considerations are the mix of informational texts with story-centered texts and whether the language in the text is authentic or modified.
4. *Evaluation and final course grade.* All decisions about how to evaluate student progress toward meeting course goals should be made before the course begins. Furthermore, those decisions should be made in concert with the course goals and the approach used in teaching the course.

54   *From reader to reading teacher*

Appendix A   Table of contents to *Reading on Your Own*

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56 *From reader to reading teacher*

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58   *From reader to reading teacher*

Designing the reading course   59