

HOW TO TURN A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE INTO A SUCCESSFUL METHOD OF TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract: *Newspapers can be used to teach many aspects of language and communication skills. We have used newspapers extensively because they have certain qualities that make them effective as teaching tools.*

In this paper we will outline the steps teachers should take when planning their reading lessons. This will be followed by the taxonomy of pre-, while-, and post-reading activities that can easily be used with newsmagazine reading passages. While the focus of this paper will be on the use of newsmagazine articles for intermediate and advanced students, the above-mentioned activities can be easily used with other text genres or with less skilled readers.

Key words: *newspaper article, teaching tool, pre-, while-, post-reading activities*

More and more English newspapers and magazines are becoming available either in paper or electronic format in our country. As a consequence, teachers of English have the choice to bring newspaper articles to class and to actually use them in their teaching/learning process. Given the growing importance of the reading activity, teachers can make use of these authentic materials to help their students both increase their reading skills and make them become familiar with interesting topics. Through the newspaper article, a teacher can provide students with not only the opportunity to practice their reading skills but also to develop strategies to approach new topics, longer or more complicated reading passages, new vocabulary, etc. Thus, students can develop reading skills which will vary according to the purpose and the type of the passage to be read. The reading and its afferent activities act as a starting point in tackling other oral or written activities in class. The development of reading skills can include activities to be performed by students before, during and after the actual reading of the assigned passage. Depending on the chosen newspaper article, class objectives and available time, the teacher can decide upon covering all the above-mentioned activities in one class or in different classes.

In this paper, we will attempt to pinpoint the steps that a teacher has to follow during one reading class. Teachers who make use of newspaper articles or magazines need to understand that it is not enough to just hand out the respective materials and have students read them through. They need to plan tasks and activities in order to:

- prepare students for the reading activity;
- help students boost their reading skills;
- help students understand the reading fragment.

Teachers also need to pay closer attention not to overlook the following steps which are of outmost importance since they contribute to the success of this activity:

1. The article will be selected by taking into consideration such aspects as:

- The topic of the article should draw students' attention;
- The content of the article should be useful, more precisely it should provide

general knowledge, introduce new and useful vocabulary, rely on information already acquired by students from other reading activities, ensure the use of gained information outside the English classes; in other words, it should help them communicate more easily by making use of their new acquirements.

- Several questions should also be raised: How much information on the topic

do the students already have? Is it necessary to introduce new materials, concepts and vocabulary in the activity preceding the actual reading in order to facilitate students' familiarization with the topic? Are there any students who

might provide their classmates with information on the chosen topic?

2. In terms of complexity and content, the evaluation of the selected article should be performed by taking into account the answers to the following questions:

- How difficult will the text comprehension be? Which parts of the article could pose problems (length, vocabulary, rhetorical structure, etc.)?
- What strategies should students put to use in order to understand the text? (partially or wholly)
- Which aspects of the article could facilitate the text comprehension (sentence clarity, tables, graphs, etc)?

3. The purpose of the reading activity will be clearly determined and objectives will be set for students to achieve after reading through the assigned text. In doing so, the following should be taken into consideration:

- The passage will be entirely read or certain aspects will be exclusively under examination, focusing on specific details;
- The reading activity includes solely the actual reading or is followed up by other class activities.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

The wide choice of activities that could be done before the reading activity itself can positively impact on the increase in students' focusing capacity, by stimulating their curiosity and imagination, and at the same time by motivating them to read the respective passage.

Provided all students or at least some of them are already familiar with the topic to be read, the pre-reading activity itself can be designed with a view to encourage knowledge sharing among students. In case the teacher notices that few students know something about the topic but it is of interest to them, then the pre-reading activities should be devised in such a manner that the new information is highlighted and useful for a better understanding of the text.

Subsequently, we will examine several activities out of the many potential ones that exist in the literature without exhausting them all, though. We will make reference solely to the ones that we have already tested and experimented with, and that we consider not only interesting but also effective.

Creating a mind map.

Even before browsing the article, the students can create a mind map on the blackboard where information on a central topic is graphically displayed in order to stimulate logical associations between words. The teacher begins the activity by writing down a key word in a geometrical figure of their choice in the central area of the blackboard. Starting from this key word, the teacher can elicit answers from students as to what the topic of the newspaper article might be. From here, students will develop the mind map by adding topic-related words, ideas and concepts.

Once the mind map completed, the teacher can:

- pinpoint the topics that student will come across in the article,
 - ask students to take a short look at the article and find out the topic,
 - encourage students to develop that particular part of the mind map that reflects the content of the article.
- Such an activity firstly stimulates team work since the mind map can be created in working groups but also individually.

Looking for main ideas.

After examining the title, students will be directed to do the reading of the first and last paragraphs of the article to grasp its main idea. Another way of achieving this would be to read through the first paragraph and then read exclusively the first sentences of the other fragments before finding the main idea. The timing that we should assign for this activity has to be tight since we do not want students to get the chance to read the entire article.

Looking for details.

After examining the title, students can be asked to look for the main pieces of information from the article. To facilitate students' work, the teacher can put forward a series of questions meant to help them more easily discover the information they are in search of. This activity should also be performed within a short time limit to prevent students from reading the entire article.

Paragraph Matching.

The teacher writes down the main ideas of each and every paragraph, making sure they are scrambled, that is not following the very order they appear in the text. Once written on the blackboard, the teacher can ask questions such as:

- In your opinion, what is the title of the article?
- What is the article about?
- Who is the article about?

The next step will be to ask students to match each paragraph with its corresponding main idea.

Examining Pictures.

If there are explicit tables or graphs, students can be asked to examine them and find the main idea of the article by interpreting them.

Reading carefully certain paragraphs.

If the structure of the article contains one or more paragraphs that summarize or include the main ideas of the article, students will be asked to answer a set of questions after reading only the respective paragraph(s).

Working with the dictionary.

Students could be asked to use the dictionary to find definitions, synonyms, antonyms for the key words. It would be ideal to place these key words within a context. More precisely, the words will be in a logical context but most importantly, this will indirectly familiarize students with the content of the article.

Analyzing new words.

New vocabulary can be introduced by:

- searching definitions, synonyms, opposites, etc in the dictionary;
- using new words in context and creating situations to facilitate their comprehension;
- making students become familiar with the word families and the derived words.

WHILE-READING ACTIVITIES

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The main purpose of the while-reading activities is to facilitate the reading comprehension of the selected passage. These activities are meant to encourage students to become active and proficient readers.

Reading for a specific purpose.

The teacher can urge students to do a selective reading by giving them questions to answer while they read the passage or by asking them to fill in certain tables or graphs as they go along.

Highlighting important text parts.

The teacher can also ask students to highlight the most important aspects of the text while reading, or to answer a set of questions previously given to them.

Note-taking.

During the reading, students can take meaningful notes that will give further opportunity for increasing their knowledge of the subject.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, these activities follow up the reading and provide students with the opportunity to revise, synthesize, summarize and comment upon the content of their reading. Most of the time, these activities are assigned as homework.

Discussing the article among themselves.

Students could be asked to discuss the main ideas or the entire article in pairs, in groups or as a class. Instead of asking them to make the summary of the article, the teacher could ask questions to stimulate the dialog and the exchange of ideas and opinions between students.

Making a summary.

Students could be asked to make an oral or written account of the text by making use of the information taken from the reading.

Vocabulary practice.

Once the reading completed, students could be asked to refer back to the text and find the meaning of certain idioms from the text, and the synonyms or antonyms of certain key words, or finally to point out words belonging to specific word families.

Looking for details.

Once the reading of the text has been completed, the teacher can ask students to answer a set of questions either orally or in writing (on the blackboard). The questions should be conceived so that students express their opinions regarding the respective text.

Creating or revisiting the mind map.

If a mind map was created during the pre-reading stage, it is now that it should be settled into shape and developed by adding all the details that were previously acquired.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of newspaper articles to teach English provides students with the opportunity to read authentic materials within a short period of time, and also helps them develop their reading skills, namely the comprehension of a text written in a foreign language, and last but not least, effective communication skills in the respective language. This kind of activities will be successful provided the teacher:

- determines students' interest, their language needs as well as their knowledge background;
- selects an interesting article that is relevant to students;
- defines the purpose of the reading activity;
- designs the most appropriate pre-reading activities, as well as while- and post-reading ones.