



Reading Comprehension Basics: Non-Critical Reading Strategies

General Information:

Reading academic texts is a difficult task for many students. However, using these reading strategies will help you when reading a text that may seem overwhelming or unclear. This guide lists two different fundamental reading strategies and explains how to confront difficult vocabulary when reading texts.

Purposes of Reading

People read different kinds of texts (e.g., scholarly articles, textbooks, reviews) for different reasons. A couple of these reasons include:

- to *skim* to get an overview of the text
- to *scan* for specific information

What is skimming?

Skimming is one of the first reading strategies you should use when approaching a text. Think of skimming as if you are looking at different restaurant menus. You are not looking for a specific dish; you are looking at the general options and seeing if you are interested in going to that restaurant.

Skimming is useful for:

- identifying the text's main ideas (also known as 'the general gist')
- seeing if the text is relevant and / or important.

Let's skim the following text:

Dutch YouTube pranksters managed to trick more than a dozen art lovers into thinking that a cheap print from IKEA was a valuable work of modern art. The team placed the cheap canvas on display in a museum of modern art in the Netherlands and asked the art lovers for an appraisal, saying that the art was by a famous Swedish artist called 'Ike Andrews'. Apparently, nearly all of the 20 people interviewed fell for the lie; they talked of modernity, symbolism, emotion – the usual talk of an 'expert'. The team eventually revealed its IKEA hoax and a majority of the art lovers saw the funny side but not all were pleased about being duped.

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3002712/Pranksters-cheap-IKEA-print-art-gallery-ask-experts-value-saying-worth-nearly-2million.html>

After skimming, the main idea we can get from this text is that Dutch Youtubers tricked some art fans with an IKEA painting. We do not necessarily remember the *details* after skimming, but we can understand the *general gist*. The key here is to not let some unknown words scare us into thinking we do not understand the text.



Key tip: A good way to understand the main idea can often be done by reading the first (topic) and last sentence of a paragraph. At the end of each topic sentence, your eyes should drop down through the rest of the paragraph, looking for important pieces of information, such as names, dates, or events.

Headings and Subheadings

Often, you can predict what a reading is about by its heading and subheadings. Once you have an idea of where the reading is headed, you can begin to read only the first sentence of each paragraph. If you do not get the main idea in the topic sentence or if the paragraph greatly interests you, then you may want to skim more.

What is scanning?

Scanning is the reading technique used to find specific pieces of information. Think of scanning as if you are looking through a restaurant menu for a *specific* dish instead of browsing the different menu options.

Scanning is useful for:

- finding specific keywords or phrases in a text
- answering specific comprehension questions

Let's say, for example, that we wanted to scan the same text for how the art-lovers *felt* about being tricked. Through scanning, we can find this information. It is highlighted below.

Dutch YouTube pranksters managed to trick more than a dozen art lovers into thinking that a cheap print from IKEA was a valuable work of modern art. The team placed the cheap canvas on display in a museum of modern art in the Netherlands and asked the art lovers for an appraisal, saying that the art was by a famous Swedish artist called 'Ike Andrews'. Apparently, **nearly all of the 20 people interviewed fell for the lie**; they talked of modernity, symbolism, emotion – the usual talk of an 'expert'. The team eventually revealed its IKEA hoax and a **majority of the art lovers saw the funny side but not all were pleased** about being duped.



Key tip: While scanning a text, you do not need to read the text word-for-word. Let your eyes glide over the text and identify the key pieces of information for which you are looking specifically.

What about difficult vocabulary?

It is common for students to feel intimidated by new vocabulary when reading a text. Often, students will give up and think of a text as "too hard" when they see too many words they do not know. However, there are strategies that can make new vocabulary less scary:

- After skimming and scanning the text, highlight or underline specific words that you do not understand.
- Separate what you do understand from what you do not.
 - Create two columns in your notebook beside the text you are reading. In one column, write down what you do understand about the text. This can help you figure out the parts that you do not understand, which you will write in the other column.
- Beside each word, identify its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc).
- To increase your reading skills, make a predication at what you think each word means.
- Look up the word's meaning and fit that meaning within the context of the sentence. Note that some words can have more than one meaning.

Here we have the same text with some highlighted words that may stumble a reader in their initial reading.

Dutch YouTube **pranksters** managed to trick more than a dozen art lovers into thinking that a cheap print from IKEA was a valuable work of modern art. The team placed the cheap canvas on display in a museum of modern art in the Netherlands and asked the art lovers for an **appraisal**, saying that the art was by a famous Swedish artist called 'Ike Andrews'. Apparently, nearly all of the 20 people interviewed fell for the lie; they talked of modernity, symbolism, emotion – the usual talk of an 'expert'. The team eventually revealed its IKEA **hoax** and a majority of the art lovers saw the funny side but not all were pleased about being **duped**.

Understanding Columns

Having two columns with the main ideas you understand next to the words you do not understand can help you in the process of figuring out words' meanings.

What I Understand	Words I Do Not Understand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">YouTubers tricked art fans with an IKEA painting20 people believed the lieSome people thought it was funny; others were not happy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PrankstersAppraisalHoaxDuped

Part of Speech

An important part of figuring out a word's meaning is to determine its part of speech. This can often be done by looking at the words that surround it. For instance:

- managed* occurs right after *pranksters*, so we can determine that *pranksters* is a noun since it precedes a verb (*managed*).
- appraisal* is also a noun since it is the indirect object of *team*.
- hoax* is a trickier word to figure out; IKEA is a noun, so we can also assume that *hoax* is a noun since it is grouped together with IKEA.
- duped* comes right after *being*. If we think about other words that normally follow being, they are adjectives (being good, being bad, being angry, etc).

Meaning Predictions

Now we can attempt to guess each word's meaning:

- Since we have determined that *pranksters* is a noun, let's look at what pranksters do in this sentence: "...*pranksters managed to trick* more than a dozen art lovers." Given that pranksters managed to trick people, we can assume that pranksters are *people who play jokes on others*.
- The pranksters "*asked the art lovers for an appraisal, saying that the art was by a famous Swedish artist called 'Ike Andrews.'*" Here, we can connect the word appraisal with something to do with the value of art since the pranksters said the artwork was composed by a famous artist.
- In the passage "*the team eventually revealed its IKEA hoax,*" we can assume that hoax means *trick* since the article talks about the pranksters *tricking* people with an IKEA piece of art.
- Remembering that *duped* is an adjective, we can assume that it also means *tricked* since many of the art lovers were "*not pleased about being duped.*"

Dictionary Check and Paraphrasing

Once you have looked up these words and confirmed their meanings, you can reinforce your understanding by writing a usable brief definition in your own words or synonym in the margin of your reading. The key to becoming a better reader is to read more and extend your vocabulary!



Key tip: Do not simply write down the dictionary's meaning (or even worse, using translator!) in the margin; instead, write down your own understanding of the meaning in simple terms. This will help you understand the new word even better.

Remember: Different reading strategies are useful for different purposes. Once you use these strategies, reading different texts should become less scary and more fun for you. Like everything else, it takes a lot of practice and patience!