

Read and Run: A Communicative Reading Activity

by SARAH WARFIELD



Intensive reading in a second language (L2) can be challenging for both teachers and students because the reading level of the text is often higher than what students can easily read on their own. Reading a text that could be informative and interesting instead can become a struggle. And so, as teachers, we need to provide consistent intervention and support to help students make meaning from what can seem to them like a meaningless text. Further, a text that is difficult for students to read may lower their confidence and motivation not just for reading in an L2, but for language learning in general. To motivate my students to read those seemingly difficult texts, I used an intensive-reading task called Read and Run.

Read and Run is relatively easy to prepare and implement, mainly due to the materials needed. Teachers are encouraged to use their own textbooks for this task. The preparation explained below involves photocopying a

reading from your class textbook, but if you do not have access to a photocopier, you may use your actual class textbook.

Choosing the class textbook as the source material is deliberate. Using the textbook minimizes the time spent in materials preparation. In addition, the students are already familiar with the text, and they will have read it prior to the activity. Multiple readings of a text are necessary for an intensive-reading course. By reusing a text that the students have already read but may not have fully understood, teachers can guide them to an understanding of the text and a feeling of accomplishment.

This task is useful in teacher training as well. Workshops are always fun and productive when I include Read and Run, and the teachers quickly pick up on its benefits, agreeing that they can easily incorporate it in their own classrooms.

PREPARATION

Read and Run can be a timed activity, taking as little as ten minutes, or you can plan it as a competition that lasts until one team wins. There are four main preparation steps:

1. Use a chapter from your reading textbook and generate a list of questions and answers. The chapter you choose should be a chapter you have already been working on as a class. This should be the second or third time that students read this chapter.

You can use the post-reading questions listed in the textbook as a guide. In fact, you can use those questions entirely for this activity instead of writing your own. However, in my classes, I want my students to focus on the rhetorical organization of the text as a reading strategy that will help them read other texts, and the questions in the textbook tend to be limited to just comprehension questions. Comprehension questions do serve a purpose and are fine for class or group discussions, but their focus is often too general for my purposes. Incorporating questions about rhetorical organization and textual features can reinforce these concepts if you are teaching them in your class.

Figure 1 shows examples of question types you can use to check comprehension of a text. I usually include comprehension

questions along with rhetorical questions, which ask students to analyze the organization and textual features of a reading. In Figure 1, the rhetorical questions are in **bold**. If you generate your own comprehension questions, they should be in the same order as the information presented in the reading.

For instance, if the answer to Question 5 is in Paragraph 4, the answer to Question 6 should not be in Paragraph 1. Students should not have to “jump around” in the text. Also, it may be useful for the students if you include *where* the answer to each question can be found. For example, when you write the answer, you can also include the paragraph or line number where the student can find it in the text.

2. Create a document that students can use to read the questions and the answers. If you do not have a photocopier, you can write out the questions and answers by hand, or you can ask students to use the post-reading questions in your textbook. Each group will need one copy.
3. Make a photocopy of the chapter reading from the book. Each group will need one copy. Again, if you do not have access to a photocopier, you can use the textbook. If you are using the post-reading questions in the textbook, instead of or in addition to creating your own, you will ask

1. **What is the title of the reading in Chapter 2?**
2. **How many subheads are there in this reading?**
3. **What is the name of each subhead?**
4. Why is family the most important agent of socialization?
5. What does the hidden curriculum do?
6. What does the author say about gender roles in school?
7. What three countries does the author mention?
8. **What is one example of “cause and effect” in the text?**
9. What percentage of people believe in the hidden curriculum?
10. **Is this a persuasive text or narrative text? Why?**

Figure 1. Sample Read and Run questions used to check comprehension of a text combined with questions (in bold) that check understanding of the rhetorical organization of the text

students to cover them with a piece of paper during the activity so that they cannot see the questions.

4. Before class, tape the chapter readings along one wall. Position them with enough space in between so that a different group of four or five students can gather and work at each one. If you do not have a photocopier, you can use one textbook for each group. Lay the textbook flat on a table or group of desks. It is important that all students are able to access the reading as a group. During the activity, students should not pick the textbook up from the desk or table. It should remain in one place.

PROCEDURE

1. Divide the class into groups or teams. Assign roles. One student in each group is the *Leader*. The other students are the *Runners*. The Leader will have the easiest job because he or she will only be reading and answering questions. However, below I explain how Leaders can become more involved by giving oral clues to help their group members find answers in the text.
2. Have the Runners from each group gather in front of one copy of the chapter reading, either a photocopy taped to the wall or the textbook placed on a table or group of desks. Each team has its own copy of the reading. Have the Leaders each stand at the opposite wall from their groups. The Leaders should have a copy of the questions and answers, but they should also have a copy of the reading (perhaps just using their textbooks).
3. Explain the rules to the class. (See Figure 2 for a summary of the basic rules.) The Runners will send one group member at a time to get a question from the Leader. The Leader will relay the question quietly, whispering in a Runner's ear, and not use any text support. The Runner will then

“run”—or, for safety, walk quickly—back to the wall, tell the question to other group members, and work with them to find the answer.

When the group has the answer, the same Runner goes back to the Leader to quietly give the answer. If the answer is incorrect, the Runner must repeat the process until the correct answer is given. If the answer is correct, then the Runner returns to the wall, and a different Runner goes to the Leader to get a new question. The Leader may choose to give clues to his or her team members if they are struggling—for example, telling them to look in a specific paragraph or line of the text. As the teacher, you can monitor the Leaders and help them provide support.

Note that if the Runner gets to the wall with the reading and cannot remember the question, he or she must go back to the Leader to hear the question again.

4. Continue until all the questions are answered or until the time is up. If your class has a wide range of proficiency levels, you may want to write more questions and put a time limit on the task. If you have a class where students are mostly equal in language proficiency, you can generate a short list of questions, and the winner is the group that finishes first. There can also be second- and third-place winners. You can lessen the competitive nature of this task by fully incorporating the next step, which asks students to reflect on what they have learned.
5. You may find that the groups finish at very different times. In order to keep all students on task and engaged, plan a follow-up activity that the groups can do when they have finished Read and Run.

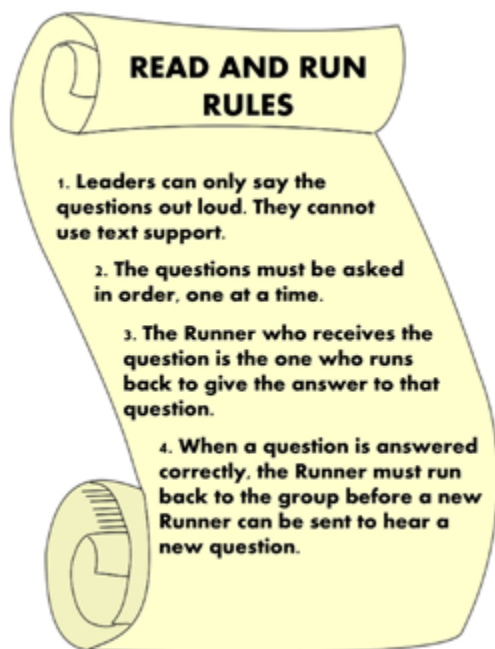
Once each group finishes, have the group members go back to their desks and go over their answers together. Ask them to talk about which questions were difficult

and why, and to consider any clues that were given or clues that could have been given. They can also try quizzing each other on the questions with their books closed to see how much they remember.

While the students who finished first are working on that task, you can help groups that are still engaged in the Read and Run. You can suggest clues for the Leader to tell the Runners, or you could assess an individual group's progress and perhaps assign a new Leader to help the group finish.

ADAPTING THE ACTIVITY

Teachers can easily adapt Read and Run for their individual classrooms. As mentioned above, if it is difficult to make copies, the teacher can do the activity by using textbooks. The questions can be shared electronically and read by students on a mobile phone or tablet. Students can be assigned the task of generating questions for homework for a Read and Run the next day. Doing this also gives the teacher a chance to informally assess students' reading-comprehension strategies by checking the questions they generate.



Graphic by Sarah Warfield

Figure 2. Basic rules for Read and Run

REFLECTION ON READ AND RUN

During Read and Run, teachers and students have the opportunity to assess students' reading ability. The teacher can do any or all of the following:

- circulate around the room and informally assess the students' progress
- notice how well students work in groups and be aware of individual students' comprehension of the reading
- notice which questions students struggle to answer and use those to inform a lesson about reading strategies
- help the Leader think of clues by using the text to help a Runner who is stuck on a question (e.g., "Look in paragraph 2 for the word that is a synonym of the word in the question").

Students will become more aware of their ability to make meaning from a difficult text. Because the task is a competition, the students are forced to find information quickly. They can reflect on how they will reuse these strategies when they are reading independently and encountering other texts.

Energizing the class and getting students engaged in reading is the most obvious and fulfilling benefit I see when I use this activity. Students who looked sleepy the previous day are now darting around the room, engaged in competition. Students who complained that the reading was too hard are now enthusiastically combing through the text to find the answers to reading questions. In other words, Read and Run turns struggling readers into confident, motivated readers.

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