

Directed Activities Related to Text (DARTs)

This technique has evolved to use reading as a way of learning a 'subject'. Its aim is to foster independent reading and actively engage the learner with text. One of its principles is that reading is no longer seen as a solitary activity, but can involve a small group or pair of learners. The technique can be used at any level and with any kind of text.

The following strategies are considered to be DARTs

Gap Fill

These activities require the learner to understand context and vocabulary in order to identify the correct words or type of words that belong in the deleted parts of a text. Words are deleted from a passage according to a word-count formula or various other criteria, e.g. all adjectives, all words that have a particular letter pattern. The passage is presented to learners, who insert correct words in the gaps as they read, to construct appropriate meaning from the text.

Prediction

Using prediction helps learners to get an idea of the general organisation, major topics and subtopics of a piece of text. It can involve learners using the beginning or the appearance (title, headings, illustrations, layout, etc.) of a piece of text to predict what comes next or in creative writing, what happens next.

Following prediction, before reading on, learners ask themselves questions, e.g. 'What would I need or want to know about this topic?'

Sequencing

Introducing learners to sequencing can help them understand the importance of coherence and cohesion within a piece of text. The process involves the learners reorganising jumbled pieces of text into a logical order but could also be adapted into on-screen 'drag and drop' computer activities.

Whole group analysis/collaborative activities

Interpreting text does not have to be a solitary activity. Learners working as a group can draw on a range of strengths which can benefit less assured readers.

Reconstruction of text

Asking learners to reconstruct text into diagrams, tables, flow charts or drawings may assist their understanding especially where learners prefer to learn visually. If the reconstruction takes place collaboratively where movement and discussion occur, those who prefer a kinaesthetic or auditory learning style may also benefit.

Questions/discussion

This can be carried out in pairs, small groups and whole group. There are different ways to use questioning, for example:

- the teacher frames the questions
- learners question each other in pairs or small groups
- the teacher asks a thought-provoking high order or open question and asks learners to consider and discuss, nominating one member of the group to respond

([see the Excellence Gateway Gold Dust Resources for more detail](#))

Topic sentences

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. Focusing on the first sentence of a paragraph gives the reader an idea of what the paragraph is going to be about and can enable him/her to map a complex text. This activity can be linked into the prediction activity above.

Paragraph heading

Encouraging learners to give an appropriate heading for each paragraph or section of the text can support them in understanding the whole passage. This could be linked to the topic sentences activity above.

Skimming and scanning are frequently confused and it is important to teach readers that they have distinctly different aims.

Skimming involves rapid eye movements across lines of text to absorb the overall theme.

To understand the gist of a text the learner skates over the title, subtitles, sub-headings, illustrations and captions of a text and then may go on to read the first and last paragraph.

Scanning involves rapid eye movements across the page, skipping most of the text but concentrating on specific detail. *It may help the learner to remember what scanning means if the teacher compares the skill with that of a hospital scanner, i.e. searching for specific diagnostic information.*

The learner searches for key words or ideas – highlighting, underlining or listing parts of the text that deal with a specific issue. This is useful when studying or looking to find specific information from a book or article quickly as there is not always time to read every word.

Activities that involve **skimming and scanning** can develop readers' engagement with their own reading skills, encouraging them to become more analytical in the process of reading

Paraphrasing and summarising - in order to complete either of these tasks successfully, accurate comprehension of the text is required.

Paraphrasing involves the learner putting a passage from source material into his/her own words. For learners engaged with an English language GCSE programme, this is a particularly useful skill to develop when wanting to borrow from a source without plagiarising.

Some tips when teaching paraphrasing:

- Explain that it is important that the learners use their own words when introducing the topic but that they should make it clear that they are presenting someone else's ideas, e.g. *According to Jamie Oliver*
- Learners should use alternative wording to the author's throughout the paraphrase.
- It is important the learner cites his source.

Summarising involves the learner putting only the main idea(s) only from the source material into his/her own words. This is a useful skill when making notes.

The following link gives some useful ideas for learners about how to summarise:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/reading/summarising/factsheet2.shtml>

Pair work

Working in pairs can improve the effectiveness of many activities designed to develop reading and writing, as well as supporting the building of confidence and fluency in speaking and effectiveness in listening and responding.

Teachers may need to be pro-active in the organisation of pairs for each learner to gain the most from the use of the strategy, by matching learners with complementary strengths and skills. Learners need to understand that they are expected to undertake the activity as a pair and not work individually although sitting side by side. Teachers need to be explicit about how the activity can be approached, such as:

- joint pre-reading of texts
- each putting forward their ideas in turn
- deciding who keeps notes
- sharing tasks such as dictionary search
- drafting and editing together

(See pages 8 and 9 Brooks,G. et al (2007) [Effective Teaching and Learning: Reading \(Summary report\)](#) NRDC to read research findings on pair and small group work).

A few ideas for paired activities.

Learners can:

- work in pairs on a writing task, sharing ideas on planning, structure, grammar and spelling
- practise communication skills by describing an item without showing or naming it to their partner, who has to guess what it is
- read a text together, taking it in turns to read aloud

- peer coach each other in skills such as ICT, map reading and dictionary or thesaurus searches
- prepare a review of a book, magazine article or poem

Useful publications:

Burton, M.(2007) *Developing Adult Teaching and Learning: Practitioner Guides. Reading.* NIACE

Spiegel, M. and Sunderland, H. (2006) *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners.* LLU+