

**ORGANIZATION OF READING COMPREHENSION CONTROL FOR
STUDENTS STUDYING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT TECHNICAL
INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION***

E.V. Riabtseva, A.A. Arestova

Department of Foreign Languages, TSTU

*Represented by Professor M.N. Makeyeva and
a Member of the Editorial Board Professor V.I. Kononov*

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Abstract: The main problems connected with teaching and examining Reading Comprehension Skills in a foreign language at university level are overviewed. The aims for each type of questions checking-up Reading Skills of students of technical specialities are formulated. The strategies for answering reading comprehension questions are introduced. The sample test is given as an example.

The subject of the present paper is an overview of one of the main problems connected with teaching students a foreign language at university level. The students of technical specialities should master all the Reading Comprehension Skills during first two years at institute of higher education. They should be able to read, understand and interpret different sources of information connected with their future profession. To achieve this aim it's important for university teachers to know how to check, control and evaluate Reading Comprehension skills of their students.

When the students work with a text they should be taught how to improve their reading speed and comprehension using two general strategies:

- read as widely as possible,
- read carefully and critically.

So, what does it mean to read as widely as possible? It means that the students should read on as many topics as possible (concerning not just their professional interests). The more they read the better readers they will be. In this way the students will know a greater vocabulary.

As to reading carefully and critically, we should teach our students to ask themselves reading comprehension questions as they are reading. They are:

- *What is the main idea?*
- *What are the details?*

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- *What can be inferred?*
- *What conclusions can be drawn?*
- *What can this word mean?*
- *What is the purpose of the author?*

In comprehension tasks the difficulty should not lie in the questions but in the text, that is the language of the questions should be easier than the text. Conversely, the questions should not be so simple or obvious, or answerable from world knowledge, as to make it possible to look first at the questions in a comprehension test and complete these successfully without recourse to the text. Any items that can be got right without the text are dubious.

In general one should avoid interdependence of items, i.e. answering one question should not be dependent on ability to answer another. If the items are not independent then one may not get an accurate estimate of the ability being measured.

There are different types of reading activities that may be used for checking reading comprehension skills of students (**RCS**). They are:

1. Reading for Details.
2. Reading for Reference and Vocabulary.
3. Reading for Main Ideas.
4. Reading for Inference.

But as to checking RCS of students of technical specialities we omit the Additional Reading skills because they concentrate students' attention on context (the kind of publication), on tone and attitude (the author's opinion or position toward the subject), on information that might precede or proceed from the passage (questions on information coming before or after the passage), on main purpose (why the author wrote the passage), on organization (the general organization of the passage or of a particular paragraph).

As to **Reading for Details** here we should speak about working with **Detailed Questions**. Detail questions ask the students about specific information in the passage. Detail questions usually begin with the words: *According to the passage, . . .*

To answer detail questions, we should teach the students to focus on the key word or words used in the question. Then they must *scan* the passage. When they scan a passage, they move their eyes quickly over the passage until they find the key words that they are looking for: a name, a date, a number. It is not necessary to read the whole passage again - just locate the key words. Once the students find the key words, they can read the sentences that follow or come before to make sure they have found the right information. The correct answer to a detail question will not usually use the exact words as found in the passage but synonyms or a restatement of what is stated in the passage. For example, if the passage states that «Eugene O'Neill was a well-known dramatist», the answer to a question about the kind of work he was known for might state that «his plays won him fame». Detail questions usually appear in the order of the information presented in the passage. This means that the answer to the first detail question will come near the beginning of the passage and the information for the second question will come after that.

There is another type of detail questions. This type of detail question asks about what is not in the passage or what is not true according to the passage. These questions have the word NOT or EXCEPT in capital letters and they are called **Detail Questions about What Is Not in the Passage**. The following are examples of such questions:

Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the passage?

According to the passage, all of the following are true EXCEPT. . .

In this type of question, three of the answers are true and one of the answers is not mentioned in the passage or is not true. The students should scan the passage to find the

answers that are true or stated in the passage. The answer that is not mentioned in the passage or is not true is the correct one. Read the sample reading passage again.

The next type of detailed questions is **Questions for Locating Details**. In some detail questions the students are asked where in the passage a particular piece of information is located. The answers to this type of question are line numbers. The following are examples of questions for locating details:

At what point in the passage does the author discuss . . . ?

Where in the passage does the author first mention . . . ?

In which lines does the author explain . . . ?

To answer such questions, the students scan the passage looking for the key words using the same technique as for detail questions.

As to **Reading for Reference and Vocabulary** we can distinguish two types of questions: Reference Questions and Vocabulary questions.

Reference Questions ask what certain reference words, such as «they» or «this», refer to. Instead of repeating words or phrases, the second time we use them we refer to them by **reference** words. Reference words are in many cases pronouns such as «it», «them», «they», or «this». So the incorrect answers are other nouns that are mentioned in the passage. To answer a reference question the students should substitute the four choices given to them for the reference word. The one that is the best substitute for it is the correct answer. For example:

In line 10, the word «ones» refers to

(A) reactions

(B) evaluations

(C) questions

(D) standards.

Vocabulary Questions ask about a word in the passage by asking which of the four choices can be substituted for the word without changing the meaning. Some of the answer choices may be correct because they may be the literal meaning of the word but not as it is used in the context. To answer these in-context questions, the students should look for clues in the passage to find or guess the meaning of the word. Many times the meaning of a word is given in the sentences around the word in the form of synonyms or paraphrases. In some cases where there is an unusual word, a definition of the word is given close by. Sometimes clues are not given but are implied, and the students can guess the meaning after they have read the whole passage. For example:

Which of the following words could best be substituted for the word "critical" in line 10?

(A) Considerable

(B) Sarcastic

(C) Important

(D) Disapproving.

Now we are going to speak about **Reading for Main Ideas**. For this type of activity we use **Main Idea Questions**. One of the most frequently asked questions in Reading Comprehension is about the main idea of the passage. There is usually one such question for each reading passage. As its name suggests, the main idea is the most important idea in the passage or what the passage is about. Each passage has main and subordinate, or less important, ideas. The main idea is more general than the supporting ideas or details in the passage. The main idea may be the first sentence in the paragraph, but this is not always the case. The main idea may appear in the middle or toward the end. When the main idea of a passage is not clear because each paragraph has a different main point, a question identifying the main topic of the passage will be asked. The following are examples of main idea questions:

- *What is the main idea of the passage?*
- *What is the main idea expressed in the passage?*
- *What does the passage mainly discuss?*
- *With what topic is the passage mainly concerned?*
- *The primary idea of the passage is. . . .*
- *The main topic of the passage is. . . .*

If the main idea of the passage is not clear because each paragraph has a different main point, then the students should summarize or combine the main points of each paragraph to find the main idea. The main idea should relate to the entire passage and not to just one part of it. Also, the main idea should not be so general that it goes beyond the passage. The four answer choices to the main idea question will contain the following types of answers:

- (A) Too general
- (B) True but only a detail
- (C) Incorrect
- (D) Correct.

As to **Inference Questions**, which are meant for checking skills of *Reading for Inference*, they are perhaps the most difficult questions to answer in Reading Comprehension. The answers to these questions are not directly stated in the passage but are understood, or implied. The following are examples of inference questions:

- Which of the following can be inferred about . . . ?*
- Which of the following can be inferred from the passage?*
- From the passage, it can be inferred that . . .*
- The passage implies that . . .*
- The author implies that . . .*
- The passage suggests that . . .*
- It is most probable that . . .*

To answer inference questions, the students must decide what logical conclusion follows from the facts stated in the passage. These ideas may be what the author believes to be true but has not stated in the passage. For example:

Lie detectors are properly called emotion detectors, for their aim is to measure bodily changes that contradict what a person says.

What can be inferred from the sentence?

- *Lie detectors record a person's emotions.*
- *Emotions can contradict what a person says.*

What cannot be inferred from the sentence?

– *People always say what they are feeling. (Bodily changes can contradict what a person says.)*

– *Lie detectors cause changes in emotions. (No. Lie detectors measure or record bodily changes.)*

Now we are going to explain how to teach your students to answer different types of questions so that they could master RCS. Firstly, the students should know the main strategies for answering reading comprehension questions. They are:

- **Read the question first.** Read the question, not the answer choices. When you know the kinds of questions you must answer, it will be easier to find the answers.
- **Skim or read the passage quickly.** Do not read word for word or in detail. Read quickly to find the main idea and general organization.
- **Go back to the passage to answer questions.** If you know the answer, you do not need to go back to the passage.
- **Leave the difficult questions until last.**

– **Take a guess when you do not know the answer.** If you do not know the answer, take a guess. When you are taking a guess, first use a process of elimination. How can you eliminate the wrong answer on a multiple choice item? All multiple choice questions follow the same principle. There is one stem and four answer choices. One choice is correct, and the three incorrect choices are distracters. In other words, they distract you, or take your attention away from the correct answer.

Stem...

(A) Incorrect

(B) Correct

(C) Incorrect

(D) Incorrect

One of the distracters is almost correct, and the other two are more clearly incorrect. You can eliminate these two clearly incorrect choices.

Stem...

(A) Almost correct

(B) Correct

(C) Incorrect

(D) Incorrect

If you cannot decide between the almost correct answer and the correct answer, take a guess. You may have an intuitive or unexplained feeling that one answer is correct. Use your intuition when you cannot decide.

If you do not know the answer and do not have a feeling about the correct answer, use a guess letter (A, B, C, or D). Use the same letter to answer every item you do not know. Using the same letter will give you a better chance to get a correct answer.

– **Answer all questions.** Never leave any items unanswered. If you have no time left, use your guess letter.

Then the students should get to know that each type of questions demands its own peculiar strategies of answering.

Detailed Questions

The answers to detail questions will follow the order of information presented in the passage.

The correct answers to detail questions are often a restatement of what is stated in the passage.

If the question has the words NOT or EXCEPT, choose the answer that is not true or not mentioned in the passage. Answers that are true or mentioned in the passage are not correct.

Reference and Vocabulary Questions

When answering reference questions be aware that the noun closest to the reference word may not always be the correct answer.

Reference words may refer to a noun or to a noun phrase made up of several words.

If you do not know which of the four choices is the correct answer to a reference question, substitute the choices for the reference word.

If you are unable to answer a vocabulary-in-context question, try to guess the meaning from the context by looking for clues.

Sometimes the meaning of the word is given near the word in the form of a synonym or paraphrase.

Sometimes clues are not given but are implied. You can guess the meaning after you have read the whole passage.

The answer choices for the vocabulary-in-context questions may appear correct because they share the literal meaning of the word, but not the meaning as used in the passage. Look for the meaning as it is used in the passage.

Main Idea Questions

The main idea is not always the first sentence in the paragraph or passage. It can also appear in the middle or toward the end of a paragraph.

When the main idea is not clear because each paragraph has a main point, combine all the main points to get the main idea.

Make sure the answer you select for the main idea question relates to the whole passage and not just to one part of it. You can scan the passage to see whether the main idea you have selected is discussed all through the passage.

The wrong choices for main idea questions may be one of the following:

- 1) true statements that focus on one paragraph or a detail
- 2) statements that are too general and go beyond the passage
- 3) statements that are incorrect misinterpretations of the main idea

Or, briefly:

- 1) too specific
- 2) too general
- 3) incorrect.

Inference Questions

Go beyond the information stated in the passage.

Draw a conclusion or reason out what is implied - that is what the author of the passage means or believes to be true but has not stated in the passage.

Remember that the answer to the question will not be stated in words in the passage.

Beware of answer choices that go beyond what you can logically infer from the passage. Wrong answer choices will often be too exaggerated or overstated to be precisely correct.

We offer you the sample of Reading Comprehension Test which can be used for controlling of Reading Comprehension Skills of student studying English at a technical university. It has ten questions of all the types of questions described above. If a student gives 9–10 correct answers she/he gets an excellent mark, 8 correct answers means a good mark, 6–7 correct answers means a satisfactory mark. The key answers to the test the first one is B, the second one is B, the third one is B, the fourth one is C, the fifth one is B, the sixth is C, the seventh one is A, the eighth one is D, the ninth one is C, the tenth one is A.

Sample of Reading Comprehension Test

Surface engineering provides industrial solutions to improve components that are subject to corrosion or wear. This will considerably increase the lifespan of products. Generally, the solution is a special treatment of the surface to delay or even prevent corrosion, erosion, fatigue, abrasion or adhesive wear. This special

5 treatment may be the application of a coating or a modification of the surface. Because it is difficult to predict which types of wear or corrosion will occur on specific surfaces under certain conditions, the new approach towards these problems is experimental, supported by models and calculations.

10 Metal technology deals with the development of new materials and research into specific material properties, mainly for constructions and equipment in the process industry.

These materials are exposed to extreme process conditions (high temperatures, aggressive substances, high load, etc.). A coating to resist chemical attack under

15 these conditions must meet very high demands. In these situations, the new approach looks for an optimum combination between lifespan, technical integrity, availability, safety, performance and cost price. This often leads to a combination of a substrate with a surface coating.

The clients for research and development projects vary from industries to 20 governments in the maritime sector, process industry, engineering industry and surface treatment branch. Organizations developing new technologies often work together in teams covering the full production chain and comprising designers, manufacturers, suppliers and end-users.

1. According to the text, it is complicated to find out the new approach of
 - (A) prevention every special type of wear or corrosion
 - (B) prevention wear or corrosion under the exceptional circumstances
 - (C) prevention wear or corrosion experimentally
 - (D) an optimum combination between lifespan and technical integrity
2. Which of the following is NOT described in the text?
 - (A) conditions which a coating must resist
 - (B) demands for a coating to resist corrosion
 - (C) necessity for the application of a coating
 - (D) different types of negative modification of metal surfaces
3. In which lines does the author gives the exact answer to the problem of prevention corrosion or wear?
 - (A) 1–3
 - (B) 3–5
 - (C) 13–15
 - (D) 20–22
4. In line 2, the word «This» refers to
 - (A) wear
 - (B) components
 - (C) industrial solutions
 - (D) subject
5. Which of the following words could be best be substituted for the word «improve» in line 1?
 - (A) revise
 - (B) make better
 - (C) emend
 - (D) correct
6. In line 6, the word «occur» could be best replaced with
 - (A) happen
 - (B) befall
 - (C) emerge
 - (D) turn
7. Which of the following words could be best be substituted for the word «vary» in line 19?
 - (A) differ
 - (B) distinguish
 - (C) classify
 - (D) organize
8. With what topic is the text mainly concerned?
 - (A) Surface engineering and metal technology
 - (B) Special treatment of metal surfaces to prevent corrosion or wear
 - (C) The application of a coating or a modification of the surface to prevent corrosion or wear
 - (D) Improvement of construction and equipment materials properties to resist a corrosion or wear

9. Which of the following can be inferred from the text?
- (A) It is really difficult to detach surface engineering from metal technology as these both fields work at the prevention of a corrosion or wear
 - (B) The quality of construction and equipment materials are checked with the new approach towards prevention of a corrosion or wear
 - (C) The new approach towards prevention of a corrosion or wear helps to increase the lifespan of metal materials
 - (D) The combination of a substrate with a surface coating is the best way to prevent a corrosion or wear
10. Which of the following conclusions about surface engineering and metal technology is supported by the text?
- (A) Surface engineers and metal technology organizations should work together to improve components of materials that might be affected by corrosion or wear
 - (B) Surface engineers and metal technology organizations should work together as it is difficult to divide their interests.
 - (C) Surface engineers and metal technology organizations should work together to find the new coatings or modifications of the surface to prevent corrosion or wear
 - (D) Surface engineers and metal technology organizations should work together as it is easier to find an optimum combination between lifespan, technical integrity, availability, safety, performance and cost price together .

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Организация контроля навыков чтения на иностранном языке студентов технических вузов

Е.В. Рябцева, А.А. Арестова

Кафедра иностранных языков, ГОУ ВПО «ТГТУ»

Ключевые слова и фразы: вопросы, касающиеся основной мысли текста; вопросы на сопоставление значений языковых элементов; вопросы, требующие вывода; изучающее чтение; навыки чтения с пониманием; поисковые вопросы; поисковые вопросы, несвязанные с содержанием текста; поисковые вопросы, требующие указать абзац с определенной информацией; просмотровое или поисковое чтение; словарные вопросы; чтение с общим охватом содержания; чтение с пониманием языковых элементов.

Аннотация: Рассмотрены основные острые вопросы, связанные с обучением и контролем навыков чтения с пониманием на иностранном языке в университете. Сформулированы цели использования каждого типа вопросов для проверки навыков чтения с пониманием студентов технических специальностей. Представлены стратегии ответов на вопросы с пониманием содержания текста и тест-образец.

Organisation der Kontrolle der Fertigkeiten des Lesens auf der Fremdsprache der Studenten der technischen Hochschulen

Zusammenfassung: Es sind die Hauptfragen, die mit der Ausbildung und der Kontrolle der Fertigkeiten des Lesens mit dem Verständnis auf der Fremdsprache in der Universität verbunden sind, untersucht. Es sind die Ziele der Nutzung jedes Typs der Fragen für die Prüfung der Fertigkeiten des Lesens mit dem Verständnis der Studenten der technischen Fachrichtungen abgefasst. Es sind die Strategien der Antworten auf die Fragen mit dem Verständnis des Inhalts des Textes und die Prüfung-Muster vorgestellt.

Organisation du contrôle des savoirs de la lecture en langue étrangère des étudiants des écoles supérieures techniques

Résumé: Sont examinées les principales questions liées à l'apprentissage et au contrôle des savoirs de la lecture avec la compréhension en langue étrangère à l'université. Sont formulés les buts de l'utilisation de chaque question de contrôle des savoirs de la lecture avec la compréhension des étudiants des spécialités techniques. Sont présentées les stratégies des réponses aux questions avec la compréhension du contenu du texte ainsi que le modèle du texte.
