

# Motivating Reading Fluency

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This paper looks at how graded reader libraries can be used for first-year English reading classes as one important form of content-based learning. A basic rationale for graded reading is given, and a pilot extensive reading placement test is presented and reviewed. Various options are then set out for organizing a one-term course of graded reading, before student feedback and wider questions of reading development are considered.

## BACKGROUND

If first-year students are observed reading English silently at the beginning of the academic year, a number of interesting things can be noted—some cannot read without constant dictionary use; others follow the text with their ruler, or point at every word as they read, while other students sub-vocalize as they read. In short, many students are reading word by word, and are stuck as soon as they meet a word that they don't know. These reading behaviours, while not true of all students all the time, are nonetheless common, and seem more often than not to be a result of both prior learning experience and text difficulty. On the one hand, the students have become accustomed to processing text at the word level and are not used to 'chunking' the text into meaningful segments: reading has become a slow plodding experience, where the effort after meaning is constantly derailed by a lack of confidence and enjoyment. On the other, students have become used to viewing reading as intrinsically difficult, since they will have previously had to study reading passages not for the purpose of meaning or enjoyment, but for learning grammar and practising translation. Graded reading is however different. It offers to the students the opportunity to read with ease and with near total comprehension. Because of this, using graded readers can motivate students towards reading fluency at the beginning of the academic year.

From a theoretical point of view, three important points can be emphasized as a basic rationale for graded reading in a foreign language. First, reading in the foreign language can be said to begin with the automatic recognition of words, which can only be achieved through a large amount of reading practice with easy-to-understand texts (e.g., Koda, 1996). Secondly, graded reading allows students to deepen their awareness and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in use (Nation, 1997). Thirdly, because graded reading leads to a high rate of success and enjoyment, such an approach to reading is highly motivating (Dickinson, 1995). In support of these claims, various studies have further shown that graded reading leads to distinct benefits in terms of language improvement. Students learn new vocabulary in context and re-activate previously learned

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vocabulary (Coady, 1997). They also assume more positive attitudes to reading and learning the foreign language; their reading speed improves, and their writing ability similarly develops (Elley, 1991; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Robb & Susser, 1989; Tudor & Hafiz, 1989).

### Graded reader resources

From the kakenhi budget, a number of graded reader libraries was bought and organized for use by teachers of English at the Foreign Language Center. Most of these libraries consist of graded readers from the *Oxford Bookworm* © and *Oxford Factfile* © series, although some of these class libraries also include content-based materials for native speaker young teenagers (the Usborne library for example); and others include books of a more global content at a much more advanced level.

### Understanding graded reading

Graded reading books consist of simplified text. Simplification is achieved through the books being written within controlled vocabulary, grammatical, syntactic and sentence-length limits. For the most part, graded readers are commonly referred to by the number of headwords that each stage is broadly limited to. Thus, in the *Oxford Bookworm* © series, for example, there are six stages: 400, 700, 1000, 1400, 1800 and 2500 headwords. A few example sets of four sentences from books at Stage 1, 3 and 5 may further quickly illustrate how the content is linguistically graded:

#### **Figure 1.**

#### **Graded reader example extracts**

**Stage 1** The man with short white hair was tired. He couldn't sleep and he couldn't eat. He thought only about one thing, all the time. He drove and he watched, and he waited and he followed. (*Goodbye Mr Hollywood*, p.26)

**Stage 3** Wyatt did not find the answers to his questions that night. Julie seemed very pleased to see him, but did not seem to want to be alone with him. When he went into the bar of the Grand Hotel, she was talking to an older man with short grey hair and a square face. Julie introduced him as John Causton, an Englishman who was a newspaper reporter with a big London paper. (*Wyatt's Hurricane*, p.7)

**Stage 5** When I entered Miss Havisham's room, there was a well-dressed lady sitting with her. When she lifted her head and looked at me, I realized it was Estella. She had become so beautiful that I felt very distant from her. In spite of all my education, I still seemed to be the coarse, common boy she used to laugh at. (*Great Expectations*, p.57)

**Stage 1** can be seen to include simple adjective + noun combinations; several simple subject + predicate clauses; and simple coordinated sentences. **Stage 3**, in contrast, features sentences with a greater average word length, subordinate + main clause sentence patterns, and relative clauses. On the other hand, **Stage 5** features a greater range of tense and aspect, impersonal 'there', report structures, and result clauses. Similarly, vocabulary choice moves from very frequent towards less common. In addition, books at the earlier stages include a higher rate of illustrations as contextual support and reinforcement for the written text.

### Graded reader class libraries

There are several graded reader libraries for use at the Foreign Language Center, each of which has been colour-coded. *Green dot* books consist of Stages 1 and 2; *blue dot* of Stages 3 and 4; and *red dot* of Stages 5 and 6. Some libraries are made up of 100 books or so, with 20 different titles in the library. Such class libraries have 50 books at one stage, and 50 at the other stage, with a choice of 10 titles for each stage (or five copies of 20 different titles in total). Other libraries (green and blue only) include just two sets of titles, with 40~50 books of the same title at either stage. Here the emphasis is placed upon a class of students all reading the same book at the same time. In this paper, I look in detail at how multi-title libraries can be used for first-year English reading classes.

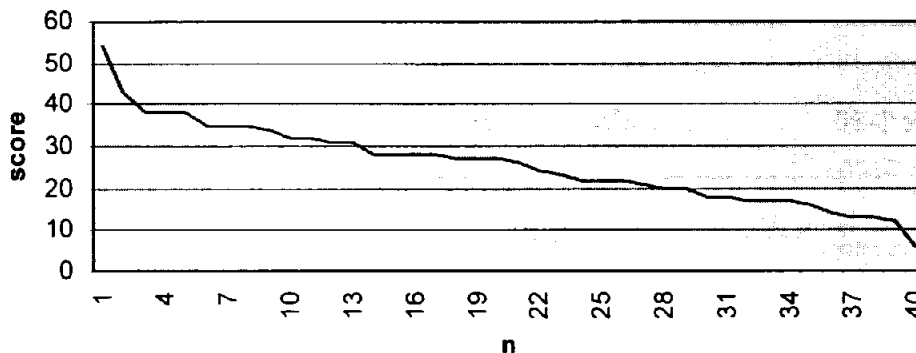
### CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL LIBRARY

To give an idea of what *Bookworm*© stages are appropriate, a simple placement test can be used. Here, a pilot test has been developed from texts in the series. It works as a modified C-test (Jafarpur, 1995; Read, 1997), where, within 30 minutes, students must complete 120 items. 'Modified C-test' means that the second half of the word in each item has been deleted. Where the original word had an even number of letters, half that number of letters of the beginning of the word appear. Where the original word had an odd number of letters, half that number of letters +1 of the beginning of the word are included. This placement test is included as Appendix 1 to this paper, together with a short explanatory note. What format does the test take? The test features twelve 100-120 word texts, with ten items to be guessed in each text. For each stage in the *Bookworm*© series, there are two texts, and the test moves from Stage 1 texts through to Stage 6 in sequence. So, texts 3 and 4 in the placement test, for instance, are from Stage 2 *Bookworm* Readers, while texts 5 and 6 are from Stage 3. To do the test, students need to read quickly, and make their guesses. In the process, students automatically reach their natural cut-off point for a particular stage.

The test has been piloted to see how reliable the test is. In its present form, the test is able to place students at different levels within the same class group; it can also be used with different classes at generally different starting levels. Some basic statistical indicators follow to support these

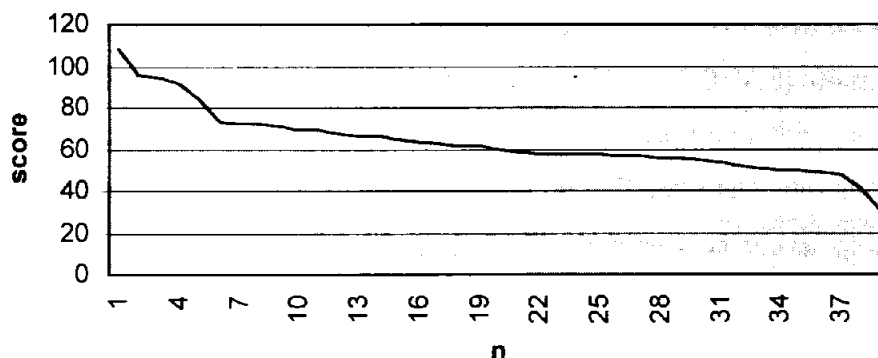
claims. With a reading class at the Taiiku C level (n=40), the mean was 26.1, the median 27, and the mode 28, with a range of 48 (6-54). The standard deviation was calculated to be 9.54. Thus, at this level of analysis, the test can distinguish between different students at a low level of reading proficiency, and create a left-skewed distribution. This is shown in the following figure which displays the total scores achieved by each member of the class.

**Figure 2.**  
**Low-level group score distribution**



A similar distribution of total scores also holds true for a mid-level proficiency group such as Bio-Resources A. When the test was trialled with this class (n=39), the mean was found to be 63.1, the median 59.5, and the mode 58, with a range of 78 (30-108). The standard deviation was

**Figure 3.**  
**Mid-level group score distribution**



calculated to be 15.49. Again, a left-skewed distribution is obtained, with a suggested ease of comprehension on the cusp of Stage 4.

The test, however, is by no means perfect, as judged by item facility. Several items need revision in order to provide better item facility values. For a low-level group, item facility generally holds good with the first 40 items—items beyond this are simply too difficult for the great majority of students. In other words, item facility tails off sharply with such a group at the 40-item mark. Indeed, seen as a whole, the first 40 items, on the whole, tend towards the lower medium difficulty range, with a low-level group, as reflected in the following table.

**Table 1**  
**Low-level Reading Group Item Facility**

Item Range 1-40	Facility Value
Mean	0.47
Standard deviation	0.27
Median	0.47
Mode	0.3

Specifically, if the cut-off points are taken at 0.15-0.85 as Oller gives as useful limits for deciding item facility (Oller, 1979, pp. 247), the following items prove to be of too high a difficulty: Item 1 (F.V. 0.1), Item 9 (F.V. 0.15), Item 10 (F.V. 0.15), Item 25 (F.V. 0.15), Item 30 (F.V. 0.05), and Item 40 (F.V. 0.05). These items therefore need to be replaced with less difficult ones. In contrast, with a mid-level group, item facility generally holds good with the first 90 items but then drops sharply. Here, the first 90 items tend towards the upper medium difficulty range, with a mid-level group, as can be seen in the Table 2 on the following page.

The high mode results from the fact that many students in a mid-level group are able to answer correctly items within the 1-40 range. Difficulty arises after this point. In this class's case—and again following Oller's suggestions for cut-off points—the following items proved to be of an inappropriate difficulty: Item 43 (F.V. 0.12), Item 46 (F.V. 0.08), Item 53 (F.V. 0.97), Item 63 (F.V. 0.05), and Item 85 (F.V. 0.1). These items therefore need to be reconsidered, and, for the time being, treated with caution.

**Table 2**  
**Mid-level Reading Group Item Facility**

Item Range 1-90	Facility Value
Mean	0.65
Standard deviation	0.27
Median	0.72
Mode	0.95

Despite its problems, the pilot version of this modified C-test can generally provide both a reliable trace of a student's reading level and a very quick guide to what stages will be appropriate to start a class with. The test is sensitive enough to allow a teacher to see very clearly those few students that will be reading at one or even two stages above the majority of the class, as well as identify from the beginning which students need the most simplified of materials to begin with. A final strength of the test format is that the placement test is user-friendly and administratively easy: students enjoy doing the test, and they can correct each other's answer sheets within 15 minutes. Thus, the time required for administering the test and getting the results back comes to about 50 minutes.

The placement test is, however, not totally necessary! An alternative to using the test is simply to start off the whole class with Stage 1 readers, and to explain that the students can quickly move up to other levels according to how they themselves judge the difficulty/ease of the text they are reading. Similarly, over time, the more a teacher uses graded readers and the more he or she knows what levels are typical for different class groups, the easier he or she will find it to predict accurately what stage(s) will be most appropriate to start off with. A word of caution here, though: it is easy to overestimate the students' starting levels. Even students in a Medical A group—generally considered one of the most proficient English classes in the first year at the University of Tsukuba—may be more comfortable starting off with a Stage 3 or 4 reader than being asked to read Stage 5 or Stage 6 books.

## **GETTING STARTED**

As explained previously, a multi-title graded reading class library will have at least 100 titles in it. The teacher therefore needs to consider how the books can be displayed in the classroom, so that

students can look through the titles and choose one at the appropriate stage for themselves—and also one of appropriate interest. Tastes vary enormously, and the simple act of being to choose their own reading material is the first step for motivating students towards reading fluency.

Yet, before students use the library for the first time, the teacher needs to consider the best physical layout and organization of the classroom. Only a certain number of students will be able to look through the library at any one time. Thus, the teacher needs to invite, say, students in groups of six to come up and make their choice. Students also need to fill in their personal information for their reading record sheets, so that who borrows which book can be tracked. What is a reading record sheet? This is a simple administrative device for keeping track of the borrower, the title(s), and for documenting how many pages each student is reading a week. (An example reading record sheet is included in [Appendix 2](#) for reference.) To use the reading record sheets, the teacher simply hands them out at the beginning of class, so that if students use the library and change books during the lesson, they can quickly record this. To record the code, aka catalogued number, of the book that they are reading, students need to be shown how to find the code number on the inside of the back cover. The number in the circle represents the library number; the number outside the circle represents the book's number within that library. At the end of the lesson, students should be asked to fill in how many pages they have read since the end of the previous week's lesson. The teacher can then collect in the reading record sheets in order to have a very quick way of checking how each student is cumulatively doing and of planning one-to-one follow-ups in the next lesson.

### **Explaining graded reading to the students**

It is important to explain the rationale of graded reading to students so that they can make the most of the course. First, it is useful to show the students the library and let them get an idea of the kinds of books that they will be reading. Next, it helps to poll the students and see how many have read such kind of books before—those that have will probably have used them as 'side reading', 'rapid reading', or 'supplementary reading' in Senior High School. The next point is to explain very clearly that they will choose books according to their own interest, and according to their own ease of reading. From this, the teacher can then also explain that graded readers are written within a controlled vocabulary so that they can enjoy reading at their own level, while all the time making the vocabulary that they know and meet in the texts more active. Finally, it is important to tell students that if they choose a book and find it either too difficult or too boring, then they should stop, put it back in the library and select a different title. These points cover the main areas to explain at the very start of the course.

## STUDENT FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE

The students have chosen their first book, and have started reading in the first lesson of the year. The end of the lesson is coming, and it is now time to explain what they should do before the next class. Read ... and read! At the very beginning, it is best to ask the students to read for at least one hour at home before the next class, and then, from the second lesson, to begin to raise their reading awareness.

A very simple way to start such a feedback loop is to ask students in the second lesson to write in their notebooks a short report. Questions like the following can, in my experience, be rather useful:

- How much time did you spend reading outside class this week?
- How many pages did you read?
- Did you find the story interesting? Why (not)?
- What did you notice about your reading? Did you:
  - try to guess unknown words?
  - use a dictionary to understand unknown words?
  - understand who the characters in the story are?
  - read slowly or quickly?
- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?
- What's your goal for today's class and for reading outside class this week?

Indeed, if the teacher demonstrates different possible answers to the questions first, and then asks students to ask and answer these questions in pairs, they will be more than ready to write in greater detail a short report on their reading. As they write their reading report in their notebooks, the teacher can circulate, and see how individual students are doing, so as to encourage those that have spent little time, and to talk with those that are using their dictionaries a lot or have not read many pages yet. This allows the teacher to play a very important advisory role at individual students' points of need.

### Using notebooks

What written work should a teacher require from their students in a graded reading course? There seem to be two basic choices. The first is to use double-entry journal notes. The second is to use book review-summaries. For the first option, students use their notebooks as reading journals. Here, they copy on the left-hand page interesting and important sentences from the story that they are reading. On the right-hand page, in contrast, they write down their own response, idea, opinion, comment or feeling about some of the sentences that they have copied on the left-hand page. For the second option, students are asked to spend as much time as possible reading before they write a one-page book review of what they have been reading; they can also be asked, for example, to note down, after they have finished reading, between six and ten useful vocabulary phrases from the



book that they have read. The first option is directed towards student-student discussion of what they are reading, and to developing their ability to express their own ideas in English. The second option is oriented towards the students reflecting on what they have read and to providing evidence of their own comprehension of the story. Each option has its plusses and minuses. If the teacher wants to have an interactive reading class, where there is some degree of time spent on skills integration and pair discussion of reading, the first option is quite appropriate. However, if the teacher prefers students to read as much as possible within class time, and have a quiet library atmosphere for most of the lesson, then the second option is more suitable.

### **Moving between stages**

Graded reading puts the emphasis on reading with ease at a particular stage before attempting books at the next stage up. Thus, it is useful to require students to read four books at one level before they move onto the next. This is a general rule of thumb for creating a consolidated reading programme. If students move up a stage too quickly and start books that are too difficult, this defeats the whole purpose of motivating their reading fluency. Similarly, if students spend too long at the same stage, they may not be stretched far enough. On the other hand, if the teacher wishes to make a distinction between graded reading and extensive reading (reading for pleasure), this move between stages is not such an important consideration. In the case of extensive reading, the means remains the same—the graded readers—but the emphasis is placed much more squarely on motivation and interest. Perhaps this is where double-entry journal notes make the most sense, in the end.

### **Evaluation**

If the primary goal of using graded reader class libraries is to motivate reading fluency, it is a moot point whether an end-of-term test will add to the motivation or yield any useful information beyond what the teacher and the students already know. Instead, through collecting in the students' notebooks and reading them quickly (the reading reports, the reviews, the vocabulary noted, or the double-entry journal notes), the teacher will have a very clear understanding of what each student has achieved. If, in addition, students are required to write a self-assessment of their reading over the term (how many pages they have read; which books; what they have noticed about their reading; what their reading goals are from now on, and so on), the teacher will have even more information by which to evaluate their students fairly. One can, it is clear, set a 500-page goal for students to reach in one term (Barfield (1995, 1997) notes that a significant difference in reading and writing fluency can occur with such an amount of reading). One can also explain from the outset that any student who reaches that goal will get a grade A, provided that their notes are complete and

extensive; and that students reaching a total number of pages below 500 will receive a B, C or D grade, depending on their total and on their notes. This works quite well—provided that students know that that is the policy. At the same time, evaluation can be linked into an end-of-term extensive reading proficiency test, where the students are then graded through a combination of both objective measures and subjective interpretations of their work. Each option has its advantages and disadvantages—and individual teachers need to decide how they wish to evaluate their students.

**Mid-term student feedback**

Asking students to reflect on their reading performance is one part of running a successful graded reading course; getting students to give the teacher feedback is another. An example follows of some interesting points that came up with a Medical A group four weeks into their reading course.

**Table 3**  
**Eliciting mid-term feedback**

1. What is the biggest difference that you see between this reading course and the kind of reading that you used to do in Senior High School? (Please explain in a few sentences.)				
2. Looking back over your reading reports, how much time - on average - have you spent reading outside the classroom each week? _____ minutes				
3. Do you think that it is enough time to improve your reading in English? Why (not)? Please explain in a few sentences.				
4. How many pages have you read total so far?				
5. Please rate extensive reading according to your opinion:				
<i>very enjoyable</i> 5	<i>quite enjoyable</i> 4	<i>I don't know</i> 3	<i>not so enjoyable</i> 2	<i>not enjoyable</i> 1
<i>very useful</i> 5	<i>quite useful</i> 4	<i>I don't know</i> 3	<i>not so useful</i> 2	<i>not useful</i> 1

In terms of difference to Senior High School (*Question 1*), the following positive points were made by the students about graded reading: choice (16 mentions), not teacher-controlled grammar and vocabulary explanation (10 mentions), enjoyment (7 mentions), interest (7 mentions), not grammar-translation (5 mentions), dictionary-free (4 mentions), and reading at own pace (3 mentions). The average amount of time spent by students on reading outside class each week came to 65 minutes, with a range from 30 to 120 minutes (*Question 2*). 27 out of 33 students thought that such an amount of time for out-of-class reading was too little (*Question 3*). The students' reading totals after four weeks ranged from 36 to 180 pages, with an average of 98 pages for the group (*Question*

4). Table 4 on the next page summarizes the results for the students' ranking of the usefulness and 'enjoyability' of graded reading (*Question 5*).

From the comments that the students made, it became clear that many students were doing their out-of-class reading in one go. Because this is not a very efficient way to do things, I advised the students to spend 20 minutes a day every day, so that the story would stay fresh in their minds and that they would be able to pick up again on the narrative thread and know who was who in the story. One can also explain typical narrative structure (*situation— introduction of protagonists— series of events with problem(s)/solution(s) complications—resolution(s)—denouement*) so that students can make higher-level conceptual sense more easily. (This is also a great aid to the written organisation of book summaries.) In the main, though, both of these interventions have

**Table 4**  
**Student perceptions of the usefulness and enjoyability of graded reading (n=33)**

<i>very enjoyable</i> 12	<i>quite enjoyable</i> 16	<i>I don't know</i> 3	<i>not so enjoyable</i> 2	<i>not enjoyable</i> 0
<i>very useful</i> 7	<i>quite useful</i> 15	<i>I don't know</i> 9	<i>not so useful</i> 2	<i>not useful</i> 0

helped the students to alter their perceptions of the usefulness of graded reading and to improve their speed of reading, for one part of an overall approach to graded reading is to understand that it requires a different attitude and management of time.

### **Over-a-term student feedback and some potential problems**

In the 1997-98 academic year, I became interested in trying to find out better what students might report as difficult in reading graded stories. So, at two points in the term (the middle and the end), I asked students to report typical difficulties and to try to explain them in English. This was done with a first-year Art and Design A class. The results are summarized in Table 5 on the next page.

Though these interpretations are based on what my learners reported, some words of caution are in order about the method of data collection. First, there is a question of how explicit the data can

Table 5

**What learners report as difficult in reading graded stories**  
**(total number of self-report entries = 140)**

difficulty	number of mentions	% of total	example	learner comment (unreformulated)
inferencing / disbelief / comprehending	43	31%	<i>"Peter, you didn't write this story. You copied the story from a book. You cheated."</i>	Why did the teacher said so thing?
			<i>Victor Frankenstein died a few hours after he had written his last word. I was sad to see him die, because he had become a good friend. But he will not be unhappy or in pain any more, and I am happy for him.</i>	I couldn't understand this meaning. Why does he become happy for him?
vocabulary	32	23%	<i>He told the King that his daughter could make gold out of straw.</i>	I don't know the meaning of "straw". And I don't know "gold out of straw", too.
			<i>Many people had come to the funeral.</i>	I don't know the meaning of the last word.
sentence syntax	17	12%	<i>Then the diver came up for the last time, and the pearl that he brought with him was fairer than all the pearls of Ormuz, for it was shaped like the full moon, and it was whiter than the morning star.</i>	It is long sentence, words are used in the sentence is easy.
sentence meaning	14	10%	<i>"It's OK, man. I didn't burn, I'm fine."</i>	I don't know this sentence meaning.
real-world knowledge	7	5%	<i>Because the art group is meeting here this morning. I have to model for them.</i>	In America, is an art group meeting the house of members?
proper names	4	3%	<i>Grace bowed quietly and went back in through the dark door.</i>	I read this part of the book over and over, but I couldn't find some sentence about Grace, who she is.
Other: meta-questions, exclamations, discourse markers, pro-forms, ellipsis, pronunciation, poetry	23	16%	<i>As I landed, four of them came towards me and took me by the arms. 'We are taking you to Mr Kewin, the judge. He wants to ask you some questions about the murder of a man here last night.'</i>	One scene before this scene is a scene of ship. I feeled this change of scene is too rapid to understand. It needs much more explanation.

be considered. Seliger and Shohamy (1998), for example, rate self-reports as low in explicitness and advise multiple sources of data collection (p.127). One source only—the learners' own self-reports—was used in this instance. Second, where self-reports are used as a primary source, differences may occur between reported and actual performance, so some sort of control for what Brown (1988, pp. 29-41) terms 'extraneous variables' is recommended. It should be noted also that no explicit control was carried out, as I was unable to find enough time to cross-check what the learners self-reported at the point of collecting the data. A final reservation to note is that the

categorization of the learners' reported difficulties is by no means clear-cut. At the same time, Nunan (1992), for example, approves the rise of introspective methods of data collection in recent years for classroom research. Moreover, he notes that it is hard to 'see how the sort of data yielded by diaries and journals could be collected in any other way' (p.123).

By way of qualifying the claims that are made in the rest of this section, it is probably best to describe the results as preliminary and in need of further investigation. They do set out some interesting and possible pathways, but they are not absolutely watertight, in short. What is interesting is that the findings generally show a broad focus on reading for meaning, and a concern for vocabulary in context. There is also a clear indication of a combination between top-down and bottom-up processing skills, with the greater emphasis on top-down processing with graded readers. A final point to note is the fact that real-world knowledge and background knowledge do not figure very highly as factors of difficulty, suggesting that graded readers can be largely understood through the act of reading itself, than through reference to exophoric knowledge: confirmation that the ease of reading graded text also alters the cognitive demands made on students.

Although students are able to gain a clear and strong sense of personal success in such reading, they do face difficulties. What the results also tend to show is that neither background knowledge nor complex sentence structure feature here as major difficulties for the first-year student reader of graded text. Rather, the students report comprehending as their most frequent difficulty—but comprehension from the point of view, it seems, of identifying strongly with the characters or plot development, and of trying to make sense of an incident or action whose implied meaning is not readily apparent—of building up background and content knowledge as they read. Language, it seems, does not get unduly in the way of trying to make the best sense of the stories, in other words. Thus, the arguments made earlier in this paper in favor of extensive reading hold true—learners can read with ease, and do concentrate on comprehending; vocabulary can arise as a difficulty, but it is relative, and not the single biggest hurdle faced ( Bamford & Day, 1998; Waring, 1997).

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

With low-level starting groups, graded reading may suffice as the content of an integrated and systematic reading syllabus over the course of a whole academic year. Indeed, if the students' active vocabulary is below the 1000 headword level, it would seem entirely appropriate to organise a first-year reading course in such a way, provided that a variety of supplementary activities are also included from time to time. With mid to high-level groups, however, graded reading may need to be more fully supplemented. Options here include varying the type of text that students are asked to read—alternating, for example, between graded reading one week and newspaper articles the

next, or moving more towards academic expository text over the year. With high-level groups that experience the enjoyment of reading with near total comprehension and are able to perceive their increase in reading fluency quickly, the move towards other types of text and other types of reading skill and strategy training may become readily apparent in feedback from the students.

To understand this difference between graded reading and reading more difficult types of text, it is useful to examine—from the learner’s point of view—how students perceive this distinction. At the end of the second term with an Igaku A class, I asked the students to write about ‘How is reading authentic texts different for you from reading graded text?’ This class had used a class library of graded readers in the first term before moving on to various types of materials written for native speakers in the second term. Some of their representative comments are reproduced in Table 6 on the following page.

It can be seen that students at such a level (Igaku A students are broadly mid-intermediate+ and have, as might be expected, very high-achievement goals for themselves) describe the benefits of graded reading largely in terms of increasing reading speed and confidence, enjoying and appreciating what they read, and not being overstretched by vocabulary demands. While these are benefits for some, they also work as disadvantages for others in that the simplification involved in graded text also takes away content appeal, a sense of ‘freshness’ associated with ‘real-world’ text (as opposed to texts produced for the classroom), as well as a sense of enjoyment in encountering natural language use.

These comments are to some extent predictable with a high-level group. There are also different perceptions across the group, which may reflect differences in reading level and confidence. It is clear, then, that although graded reading provides marked benefits, the teacher needs also to consider when and how to encourage students to move towards practising other reading skills and strategies, with other types of text.

## **CONCLUSION**

Using graded reading does motivate reading fluency. The roles and responsibilities of both students and teacher change when a class uses a graded reader classroom library. The teacher needs to give up control of the learning process to the students; the students need to exercise choice and become adept in time commitment to make the most of the opportunities that graded reading can offer them. In short, graded reading helps make reading in the foreign language motivatingly accessible for first-year students by enabling them to read with ease and with speed of comprehension. Eskey and Grabe (1988), for example, note:

**Table 6**  
**What learners report as advantages and disadvantages with reading graded text (unreformulated)**

<u>Some perceived advantages</u>	<u>Some perceived disadvantages</u>
<p><b>[Vocabulary]</b> When I read graded text, all vocabries are regulated by the editor. So I can read whole text smoothly.</p> <p><b>[Speed]</b> Faster speed my reading becomes, more interesting or enjoyable reading English becomes. The difference between an authentic text and a graded text for me is speed of reading English.</p> <p><b>[Enjoyment]</b> When reading authentic text what is important is not to enjoy it, but to understand it. When we enjoy we can relax. On the other hand, when we try to understand, it takes more effort and time.</p> <p><b>[Comprehension]</b> When I read graded texts, I seldom had to use dictionary. But in reading authentic text, I had to use dictionary a lot.</p>	<p><b>[Lack of sophistication]</b> Because it controls the level of the words they use, it takes away the chance to provide readers with elaborate and varied expressions. It also loses the ability to tell what author wanted to show by the exaggerated terms, which part of the value of the book is abandoned.</p> <p><b>[Repetition]</b> I felt that these works were simplified too much and that decreased interests in them. The stories became very simple and the same words were used all over again.</p> <p><b>[Immediacy]</b> Authentic texts are much more interesting because I feel the english used are much more “fresh”! Graded text are of course helpful for us to become used to read, but to read authentic texts this term was very good.</p> <p><b>[Simplified appeal]</b> Some of the sentences of the graded texts seemed to be simplized, and stories themselves are probably shortened. To make the story easier, it’s a good way. But it may reduce the appeal of the story.</p>

...we have no clear idea at this time of how readers in general combine bottom-up and top-down processes, much less how particular readers do so. In practice, we are therefore still very dependent on each student’s natural ability to learn, and our working goal must be to facilitate, not to mechanically control, that learning. (Eskey and Grabe,1988, p. 227)

...good readers process language in the from of written text without thinking consciously about it, and good second language readers must learn to do so ... It is only this kind of *local* processing that allows for *global* reading with true comprehension. (Eskey and Grabe,1988, pp. 235-236)

Although graded reading is clearly facilitative and learner-centered, the teacher needs constantly to monitor, advise and observe, asking for feedback from the students regularly, and guiding students gradually to change their reading habits and to become more aware of their own reading processes. The teacher—it must be stressed—plays a highly active but different role within such a decentralized classroom environment. Above all, it should be noted that choosing books of interest with the appropriate ease of reading is the key to motivating reading fluency: without student

choice, motivation cannot be properly sustained. With student choice, learning can become a pleasurable and motivating experience for all concerned.

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## Appendix 1 Extensive Reading Placement Test Instruction Sheet

1. You will find 12 short passages in the QUESTION PAPER for this placement test. In each passage, there are ten words to complete. You have a total of 120 words to complete in 30 minutes.
2. For each of the ten words, you will find the first part of the word in brackets. On the ANSWER SHEET, write the complete word each time:

### EXAMPLE:

#### Question Paper:

Mary [1] (wor ) in a shop. It was a good [2] (jo ).

#### Answer Sheet:

1. worked
2. job

3. Please remember to write the COMPLETE word each time.
4. Write also today's date, your department, your first name, family name and student number at the top of the answer sheet.

### Extensive Reading Placement Test: Question Paper

#### Passage 1 (1 ~ 10)

The plane stopped and someone opened the door. Kiah ran across to the plane.

'How many can you take?' he called. 'There are twelve of us.'

'That's all right,' someone said. 'Quickly, the spaceship is waiting.'

The twelve [1] (go ) into the [2] (lit ) plane, and the plane [3] (beg ) to [4] (mo ). Rilla [5] (loo ) at the [6] (capt ) of the plane. He was [7] (ta ), with brown [8] (ha ). He [9] (see ) nice. Was this the [10] (fam ) Commander Adai?

#### Passage 2 (11 ~ 20)

There weren't many people on the train, and nobody came into Mr Harris's carriage. He was happy about that. Most people on the train slept through the night, but Mr Harris liked to look out of the window, and to read and think.

After [11] (din ) in the [12] (resta ) Mr Harris [13] (ca ) back to his [14] (carr ), and sat in his [15] (se ) next to the [16] (win ). For an [17] (ho ) or two he [18] (watc ) the trees and lakes of Finland out of the window. Then it began to get [19] (da ), so he [20] (ope ) his book and began to read.

#### Passage 3 (21- 30)

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. Every day, when she went to the shops, she spent very little money. She [21] (bou ) the cheapest meat, the cheapest [22] (veget ). And when she was [23] (tir ), she still [24] (wal ) round and round the shops to find the cheapest [25] (fo ). She [26] (sav ) every cent possible.

Della [27] (coun ) the [28] (mon ) again. There was no [29] (mist ). One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And the [30] (ne ) day was Christmas.

#### Passage 4 (31-40)

Mr Gordon was the teacher at the little village school. He was a kind old man and the children liked him. They [31] (enjo ) his [32] (les ) and he [33] (lik ) teaching them. There was no [34] (pia ) at the school. This sometimes made him [35] (unha ), because he loved [36] (mus ) very much. But he [37] (sa ) with the children. He [38] (fil ) their young [39] (min ) with songs and [40] (stor ). It was a happy school.

#### Passage 5 (41-50)

Hours passed. Then at last Wyatt noticed a change. The rain had stopped now, and he thought the wind was less [41] (viol ). He [42] (clea ) the [43] (mu ) off his watch. Four o'clock. Very [44] (caref ), he [45] (pus ) his hand out of the [46] (ho ). Yes, he was [47] (rig ). The wind was not so [48] (str ). What had [49] (happ ) out there? He had to [50] (kn ).

#### Passage 6 (51 - 60)

At last John agreed to the marriage. Mary was invited to a special [51] (sup ) because of the good [52] (ne ). Christine was very happy. She [53] (kis ) Mary when she [54] (arri ), and gave her a small, [55] (sec ) present to [56] (tha ) her. It was a pair of pretty ear-rings. At the meal, John seemed a little [57] (nerv ), but happy too. He [58] (tri ) hard to smile, and thanked Mary, although he didn't think of [59] (giv ) her a present. He watched Caroline all through the meal. He seemed to be [60] (afr ) that he would never see her again.

#### Passage 7 (61 - 70)

My mother was dead, and I'd never known who my father was. Perhaps he was dead too. I couldn't remember my mother very [61] (clea ). Charlie, who had [62] (tau ) me about [63] (photo ), I remembered very well. He had been [64] (li ) a father to me, but he was dead now. I could remember [65] (anot ) of the friends that my mother had [66] (le ) me with [67] (seve ) times - Samantha. She had been a [66] (warm-h ), motherly woman - very kind to her small [69] (uninv ) visitor. I suddenly [70] (fe ) a need to see Samantha again.

Passage 8 (71 - 80)

Sometimes when we shut our eyes and try to sleep, we see pictures that are so unpleasant that we have to open our eyes again to make them [71] (disap ). This is what happened to the Professor. Every time he [72] (clo ) his eyes he [73] (sa ) the same picture. There was a long beach with breakwaters running down to the sea, under a dark sky. He remembered it as the beach he had walked along [74] (earl ). Then, in the [75] (dist ), he saw a man running along the beach, [76] (clim ) [77] (desper ) over the breakwaters and looking back over his [78] (shoul ) all the time. Parkins could not see his face, but he [79] (kn ) that the man was [80] (terr ) afraid.

Passage 9 (81 - 90)

Moore worked without stopping until about eleven o'clock. Then he put some more wood on the fire. He also made a [81] (po ) of tea. He was enjoying himself very much. The fire was [82] (burn ) [83] (brig ). The firelight [84] (dan ) on the old oak walls and [85] (thr ) strange [86] (shad ) around the room. His tea [87] (tas ) [88] (excel ), and there was nobody to [89] (dist ) him. Then for the first time he [90] (real ) how much noise the rats were making.

Passage 10 (91 - 100)

I heard the door close again. Then I heard the sound of a match and I [91] (sme ) the smoke of a cigarette which had just been [92] (li ). This must be why he had come in. Now he would go away again.

But he didn't. I could feel that he was [93] (stan ) very near me. He [94] (sta ) there for a few seconds, but to me it [95] (see ) much longer. Then he left.

It was very hot under the [96] (blan ), but I waited for a few moments until I was sure he had [97] (go ). and then very slowly and carefully, I began to push back the covers. I had to find a [98] (wea ). I moved the blankets again - and then I [99] (fro ) with horror. My foot, in its bright yellow shoe, was not [100] (hid ).

Passage 11 (101 - 110)

In my heart I knew I was right to leave. He seemed to read my [101] (thou ). Rushing [102] (furio ) across the room, he [103] (sei ) me violently and [104] (sta ) [105] (fier ) into my eyes. He could have [106] (bro ) me in two with one hand, but he could not break my [107] (spi ). Small and [108] (we ) as I was, I stared [109] (fir ) back at him.

'Your eyes, Jane,' he said 'are the eyes of a bird, a free wild being. Even if I break your cage, I can't reach you, beautiful [110] (crea )!'

Passage 12 (111 - 120)

Jo knew what she should do. She should get the evening papers at lunch-time, read all the [111] (adverti ) for flats, and as soon as she saw one that looked [112] (suit ), she should rush round at [113] (on ) and sit on the [114] (door ). If she went later, she'd find a queue of people all down the street. Finding a good flat in Dublin, at a [115] (re ) you could [116] (aff ), was like finding gold in the gold rush.

Jo had been to Dublin a few times when she was a child. She had been on school [117] (excur ), and to visit Dad that time he had been in hospital and everyone had been crying in case he didn't [118] (reco ). Most of her friends, though, had been up to Dublin much more often. They talked in a [119] (fami ) way about places they had gone to. and they [120] (assu ) that Jo knew what they were talking about.

**Extensive Reading Placement Test: Answer Sheet**

Today's date:  
 Your department:  
 Your first name:  
 Your family name:  
 Your student number:

PASSAGE 1	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 2	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	

20	
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 3	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	

*and so on ...*

**Answer Key**

PASSAGE 1	
1	got
2	little
3	began
4	move
5	looked
6	captain
7	tall
8	hair
9	seemed
10	famous
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 2	
11	dinner
12	restaurant
13	came
14	carriage
15	seat
16	window
17	hour
18	watched
19	dark
20	opened
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 3	
21	bought
22	vegetables
23	tired
24	walked
25	food
26	saved
27	counted
28	money
29	mistake
30	next
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 4	
31	enjoyed
32	lessons

33	liked
34	piano
35	unhappy
36	music
37	sang
38	filled
39	minds
40	stories
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 5	
41	violent
42	cleaned
43	mud
44	carefully
45	pushed
46	hole
47	right
48	strong
49	happened
50	know
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 6	
51	supper
52	news
53	kissed
54	arrived
55	secret
56	thank
57	nervous
58	tried
59	giving
60	afraid
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 7	
61	clearly
62	taught
63	photography
64	like
65	another
66	left
67	several
68	warm-hearted
69	uninvited
70	felt
TOTAL	
PASSAGE 8	
71	disappear
<i>and so on ...</i>	

**Appendix 2 Reading Record Sheet**

**Student Reading Record Sheet**

Your first name		Your family name		Your student number	
Your class		Day		Lesson	
Please put your address		Your telephone number		Your e-mail address	
<b><u>Book title</u></b>	<b><u>Book code</u></b>	<b><u>Date borrowed</u></b>	<b><u>Number of pages read</u></b>	<b><u>Date returned</u></b>	