

# Teaching skills means teaching nothing

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## Things I was taught on my training courses

### **Texts were primarily there to develop skills**

- activate schemata / predict
- get the gist
- ignore words you don't know / guess the meaning
- prepare students for the outside world
- use authentic texts with authentic purpose
- skimming and scanning
- critical thinking
- students will pick up vocab (extensive reading)

Language focus was more on discourse and structure.

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## **Lesson 1**

**What do you do if you don't know a word?**

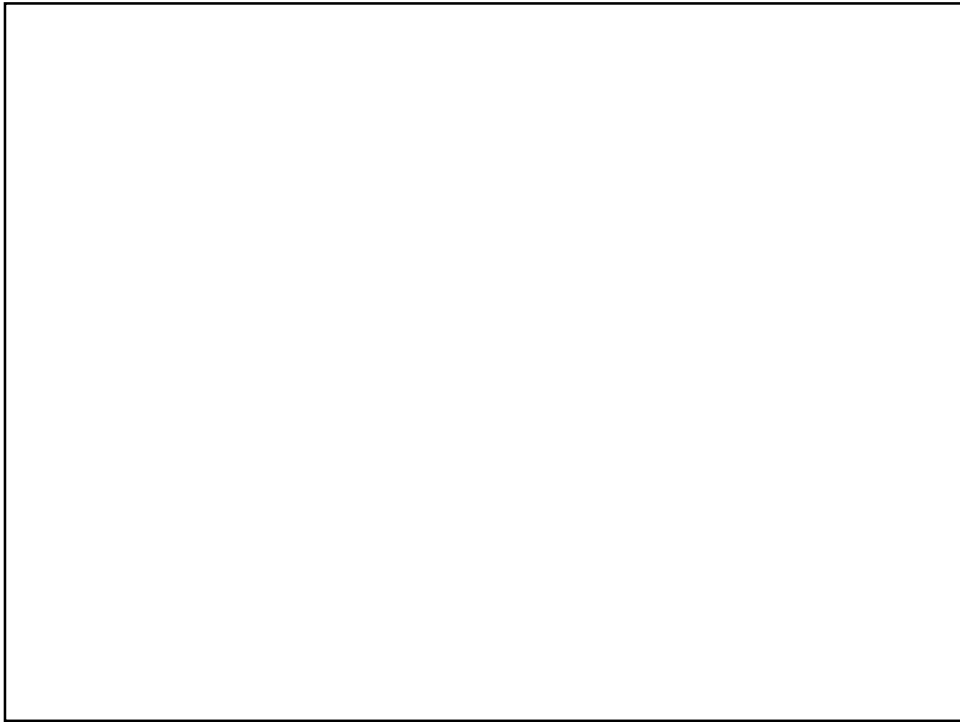
Look it up in a dictionary!

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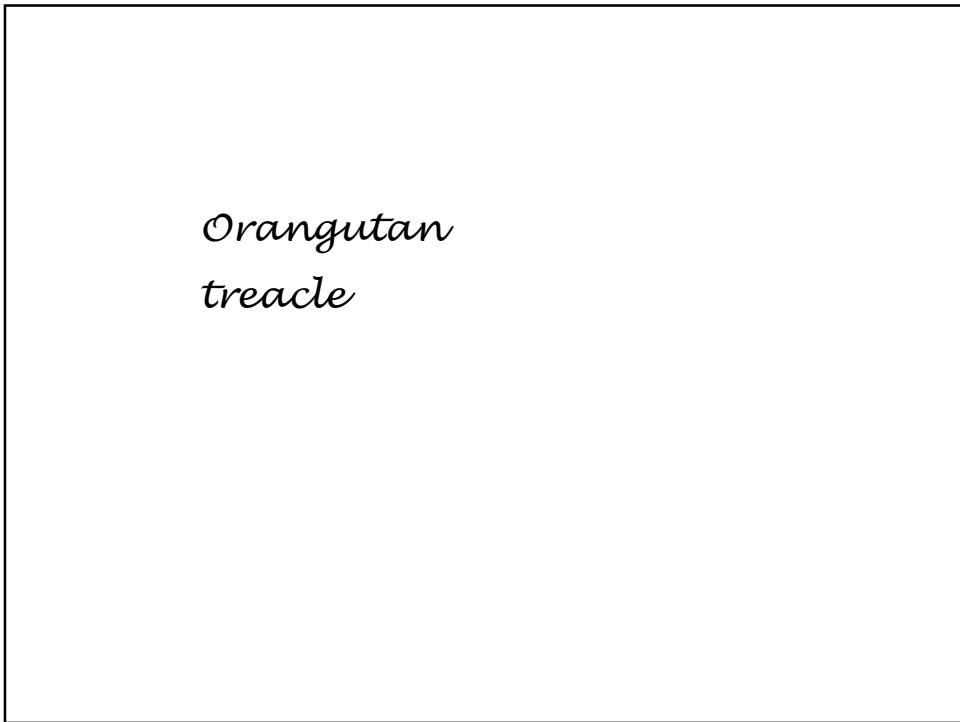
## **Lesson 2**

**What did the students learn?**

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*A paragraph is a collection of sentences linked by a common theme.*

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*Twig / branch / tree*

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## **Lesson 4**

### **The CAE lesson / Making paper airplanes**

A focus on skills and structure may only help with the text you are studying.

Lack of transferability.

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## **Lesson 5**

**Kerr:** good readers are good language knowers!

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## Lesson 6

### Assessing Reading by J. Charles Alderson

Even if there are separate skills in the reading process... it appears extremely difficult, if not impossible to isolate them for the sake of testing or research.

What appears to matter [for being a quick reader] is the massive over-learning of words and much recognition practice in transferable and interesting contexts, in order to ensure quick access during reading.

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## Lessons 7, 8 and 9!

### Catherine Walter

Importance of bottom-up processing – and pronunciation in reading

### William Grabe

Automaticity and repeated exposure – recommends re-reading up to 10 times!

### Anthony Bruton

Inefficiency of vocabulary acquisition from extensive reading

### Paul Nation

Know 97% of words in a text to guess a word.

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## Lesson 10

### **EAP classes**

Nation: 13,000 words to understand 97% of academic texts.

IELTS trap 6.0 to 7.0

Are students really lacking critical thinking skills?  
Or are they just unable to process texts fast enough?

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## Things I used to do and believe

- Use lots of authentic materials.
- Teach skimming and scanning skills.
- Tell students not to worry about the words they didn't know. Just get the gist - and that's it!
- Get Int. students to guess meaning all the time.
- Cut up texts into pieces for students to re-construct.
- Ask too many comprehension questions.
- Use texts primarily for skills rather than for language.

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## A summary, of sorts:

- Skilled language users know more language and more about how that language is used.
- EFL Ss. Are generally skilled language users in L1 - they just don't know English.
- Skills are not clearly separable - or teachable!
- Many of the 'skills' we teach are not authentic to Ss.' experience - they're particular to classrooms.
- Authentic texts are not authentic to the classroom
- Ss' reason for doing skills is to learn language.

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## What are texts in the classroom for?

- To help us teach useful language
- Alternative viewpoints
- Humour / enjoyment
- Generate discussion
- Teach content / culture / literary criticism – but *with* the language it comes with!
- Peace and quiet!
- Don't forget to treat the text as a text and something to be talked about. It's not JUST a vehicle for language!

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