



Nuala: Hi, I'm Nuala O'Sullivan and this is 'Exam Skills'. In this programme we find out what it takes to do well in reading exams.

Reading English is often OK if you've got plenty of time to do it, but in a reading exam, it can seem as if time isn't on your side! Examiner, Mark Shea.

Mark Shea

The way most reading exams work is that you have a lot of reading to do and very little time to do it. Time is more important perhaps in reading than in any other paper. If you had as much time as you needed, most students would score 100%.

Nuala: So the most important skill you need in a reading exam is time management!

Mark Shea

So you need to make sure that you know how many marks each part carries, and divide your time accordingly. Start with the part that carries most marks.

Nuala: Plan your time. And start with the section that's worth the most marks. But you'll also need to make sure that you've done the right kind of preparation for the exam. And that means learning to read in the way that these exams demand. Language teacher, Margaret John.

Margaret John

It's essential for you to avoid getting bogged down with understanding every word in a reading passage. You have to learn to read quickly and efficiently, and analyse meaning in a text, in order to answer very specific questions.

Nuala: You don't need to understand every single word, or every bit of detail. What's important is the ability to analyse the text quickly and work out the most relevant points. So how do you read quickly and efficiently, and work out where information is in a text? How do you avoid getting into difficulties because of the details? Well, Margaret John has a useful tip - something to do at home as you're preparing for your exam.

Margaret John

Give yourself two minutes, and practice at home every night. Read a text, and look at the following things: the title, the special headings, the illustrations, the ideas or organisation of the text, and the summary sentences of each paragraph. The summary sentences are usually the first, or the last sentence, and they tell you what the paragraph is about.

Nuala: Got that? Take a reading text. Look at it for only two minutes – no more! Notice: the title; special headings; examples if there are any; the main ideas; and the summary sentences for each paragraph. Then:

Margaret John

Ask yourself – even turn away from the page – and ask yourself, what was that paragraph about?

Nuala: What was that paragraph about? What's this text about? Do I need to know all the information, or are there examples or extra details to back up the

main points? Quite a lot to do in two minutes, but get used to doing it.
You'll need these quick analysing skills in your reading exam.
And once you're in that exam, what should you do first? Examiner, Mark
Shea.

Mark Shea

It's a good idea to read the questions before you read the texts, so you know what to look for.

Nuala: Read the questions first. They help you identify the information you're looking for, and make reading the text a whole lot easier.
Next, look at the text – all of it.

Mark Shea

It's a good idea to read the whole text all the way through before you answer any questions, just to make sure that you're not answering a question out of context.

Nuala: Read the whole text right through before you start answering the questions, so you know the whole picture.
And mark the text where you think important bits of information are.

Mark Shea

I'd always advise students to mark the texts where they think they find the answer, and this will save time after the exam when you're checking your answers.

Nuala: Japanese student, Noriko, finds this a very helpful approach.

Student

When the paper come, I read first the questions. I try to read the whole thing and try to construct how I answer those questions. And I want to read questions before reading start. Read all through the text, then I can maybe construct how I answer. Then back to read maybe.

The first time is just skimming and scanning. When I go back, maybe I can get appropriate part of all the text.

Nuala: And always remember the examiner's advice:

Mark Shea

Use time effectively, read the questions, and read the whole text before you answer any question.

Nuala: Good luck and good revising!