LESSON FRAMEWORKS · RECEPTIVE SKILLS

Receptive Skills Cycle – Reading and Listening

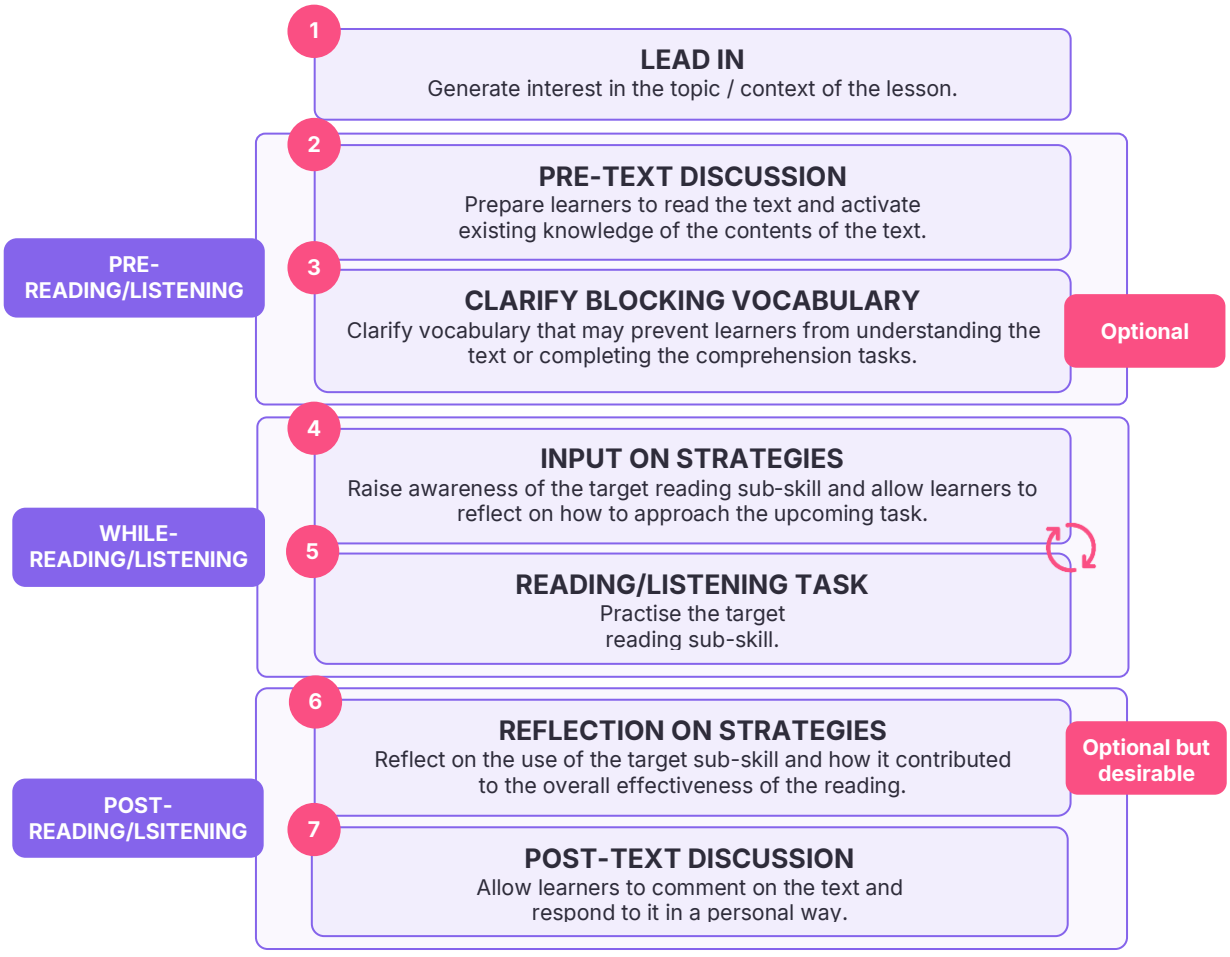
A framework for planning and teaching reading and listening lessons

Receptive skills cycle overview

A receptive skills lesson develops learners' ability to read or listen to a text and understand it for a purpose. It has three phases: pre-, while- and post-reading or listening.

Comprehension tasks alone only test or practise understanding. To help learners improve, the lesson also needs brief input on strategies: how to approach the text and the task, and why. Learners can then use these strategies with similar texts outside the classroom.

The delivery sequence – the stages of your lesson



TEACHING TIP

Stages 4 and 5 form a cycle. For each target sub-skill, learners work on the strategies first and then do the task: Input on Strategies 1 > Task 1, then Input on Strategies 2 > Task 2.

The planning process – build it in reverse

Plan backwards from the outcome you want, then teach forwards. Start with your aims and the text, so that every other stage is built to serve them, not the other way round. For simplicity, the steps below refer to "reading", but the same process applies to listening.

PLAN IN THIS ORDER	STEP 1 Aims and text	STEP 2 Strategies and tasks	STEP 3 Reflection	STEP 4 Blocking vocabulary	STEP 5 Post-text discussion	STEP 6 Pre-text discussion	STEP 7 Lead-in

RUNNING EXAMPLE Throughout the steps below, we plan one lesson: reading an online article about working from home.

1 Aims and text

GUIDES EVERY STAGE

Text

Design or choose a text that:

- ☐ is authentic or realistic and relates to real-life situations
- ☐ gives learners a real reason to use the target sub-skills
- ☐ is interesting and relevant to learners
- ☐ is challenging enough that understanding depends on using the strategies, not on knowing every word

EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME

An online article about working from home.

Main aim

Think of the target reading sub-skills (e.g. reading for the main idea, telling facts from opinions) that will help learners read and understand the text more effectively.

EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME

Target sub-skills: reading for the main idea; telling facts from opinions

Secondary aim

Think of an aim in a different skill or language area that supports the main aim. It should complement the main aim, not repeat it.

EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME

Learners discuss the article in the Post-text discussion. The secondary aim is to help them give and justify opinions.

Statement of aims

Combine both into a clear statement of what learners will be able to do by the end of the lesson.

EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME

Main aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to read an online article about working from home, reading for the main idea and telling facts from opinions.

Secondary aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to give and justify opinions.

TEACHING TIP

Choose the text and the target sub-skills together. If a text doesn't give learners a good reason to use a sub-skill, it's the wrong text for that lesson, however interesting it is.

2 Strategies and reading tasks

TAUGHT AT STAGES 4 AND 5

Think about the target sub-skills from your aims and the text.

For each target sub-skill, plan the reading task first, then the strategies that prepare learners for it. Where possible, order the sub-skills from general to specific (e.g. the main idea before facts and opinions).

Design or choose a reading task that:

- ☐ has a clear purpose and outcome
- ☐ requires learners to use the target sub-skill, not just to understand the text
- ☐ suits the text and the learners' level
- ☐ includes feedback that checks the answers and how learners found them

Design or choose a strategies stage that:

- ☐ raises awareness of what the target sub-skill is and why it is useful
- ☐ helps learners reflect on or discover how to approach the task
- ☐ is brief and leads directly into the task that follows

EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME

In class, the order is Input on Strategies 1 > Task 1 > Input on Strategies 2 > Task 2.

Input on Strategies 1: Learners discuss how they would find the main idea of an article quickly (e.g. reading the title, headings and the first and last sentences of paragraphs, and ignoring unknown words). They then compare their ideas with the teacher's suggestions.

Task 1 (main idea): Learners skim the article for one minute and choose the best summary of the writer's main point from three options.

Input on Strategies 2: Learners look at two facts and two opinions from the article and decide how they differ (e.g. facts can be checked and often include dates, numbers or names; opinions often include expressions such as I believe or In my view, or evaluative adjectives such as better or worse).

Task 2 (facts and opinions): Learners read the article again and label ten statements from it as fact or opinion.

Typical reading or listening tasks: open-ended questions, choosing titles, topics or pictures, ordering events, checking predictions, completing tables, gap-fills, multiple choice, true/false, labelling, matching headings to paragraphs, sorting or classifying statements

Typical strategies tasks: comparing examples (e.g. good and weak answers), matching strategies to purposes, discussing how to approach the task, ranking strategies by usefulness, short teacher-led elicitation

TEACHING TIP

Keep the input on strategies brief, focused on the target sub-skill and tied to the task that follows. Where possible, use guided discovery (e.g. comparing examples or matching strategies to purposes), so learners work out the strategies themselves rather than receiving a list.

3 Reflection on strategies

STAGE 6 · OPTIONAL BUT DESIRABLE

Think about the target sub-skills and the strategies from Step 2.

Design or choose a reflection activity that helps learners think about the strategies they used, how these helped them complete the tasks, and which they will use with other texts.

> EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME
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> In pairs, learners discuss: Which strategies helped you find the main idea? How did you decide whether a statement was a fact or an opinion? Which strategies will you use the next time you read an article in English?

Typical tasks: reflection questions in pairs or groups, checklists or rating scales of strategies, comparing approaches with a partner, sentence stems (e.g. Next time I read an article, I will...)

4 Clarify blocking vocabulary

STAGE 3 · OPTIONAL

Think about the text and the reading tasks.

Identify any words that could stop learners understanding the text or completing the tasks, and plan a quick way to clarify them. Limit this to three or four items, and don't pre-teach words learners can guess from context.

> EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME
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> Learners match three words from the article that are essential to understand the main idea (e.g. productivity, commute, isolation) to their definitions.

Typical tasks: matching words to definitions or pictures, quick teacher clarification in context

> TEACHING TIP
>
> Choose words by their impact on the tasks, not by how difficult they are. Check your reading tasks: if a word is essential to answer a question and learners are unlikely to know it, clarify it. More than three or four words risks turning the lesson into a vocabulary lesson.

5 Post-text discussion

TAUGHT AT STAGE 7

Think about the text and your main and secondary aims.

Design or choose a discussion that lets learners respond to the text in a personal way. Make sure it draws on the content of the text and links to your secondary aim.

> EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME
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> In groups, learners discuss: Do you agree with the writer's main opinion? Which opinion in the article do you agree or disagree with most? Which of the writer's arguments is the most convincing? Why? Learners are encouraged to use expressions for giving and justifying opinions.

Typical tasks: discussion questions, debates, ranking or rating ideas from the text, role-plays

6 Pre-text discussion

TAUGHT AT STAGE 2

Think about the text and the reading tasks.

Design or choose a discussion that prepares learners to read the text and activates what they already know about its content (e.g. through prediction), without giving away the answers to the reading tasks.

> EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME
> Learners look at the title and a picture from the article and discuss: What do you think the article is about? What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Typical tasks: brainstorming, predictions, discussion questions, questionnaires

> TEACHING TIP
> The lead-in and the pre-text discussion can often be combined into one stage. A single activity can grab learners' interest and get them thinking about the content of the text at the same time.

7 Lead-in

TAUGHT AT STAGE 1

Think about the topic and context of the text.

Design or choose a lead-in activity that:

- ☐ stimulates interest in the topic
- ☐ gets learners talking about it

> EXAMPLE · WORKING FROM HOME
> Learners discuss: Do you work or study from home? What do you like or dislike about it?

Typical tasks: brainstorming, predictions, questionnaires, discussion questions, mingling activities, visuals

> TEACHING TIP
> As long as you start planning with your aims and the text, you can plan the other stages in any order. What matters is keeping the context and target sub-skills in sight, so that every activity purposefully supports the others.