

Read & report: A one-to-one lesson format

by Lindsay Clandfield

The following lesson uses techniques that are common in ELT but that work quite well for a one-to-one situation, where the teacher can provide much more focused assistance on the learner's understanding of a text and their language output. In addition, the reading stage of the lesson – albeit short – provides a momentary pause in the lesson for both teacher and learner. Such pauses are arguably more important in very small classes, where both parties often feel that they need to constantly be “on” or “active”, i.e. speaking.

This lesson uses a text which is appropriate for learners at an intermediate or higher level. To use the lesson format with a different text, see the notes at the end on how to make your own Read & Report lesson.

Stage one

Ask some general questions about the topic of your text. Here are some questions about the text on language training.

How long have you been learning English?

Have you always learned English with a teacher?

Have you ever tried different methods of learning a language? How successful were they?

What is the best way of learning a language?

Stage two

Explain that you are going to ask the learner to read a text related to this topic. Tell them that you will give them this text in a couple of minutes.

Stage three

Show the learner the card with the ten words and the title of the article. Explain any words which the learner doesn't understand. Then ask the learner to tell you what they think the article is about.

Tactical language training

computer scientists
soldiers
basic Arabic
computer game
language laboratory
artificial intelligence
test
microphone and earphones
Lebanese village
culture training

Stage four

Give the article out and allow a few minutes reading time. While the learner is reading, it might be advisable to occupy yourself with something else (checking your papers/ agenda, making notes for the next class, looking something up... not making a phone call though). In a one-to-one situation it's a bit unsettling for the learner to read something with the teacher hovering over them, staring intently.

Ask the learner to underline any words or expressions they don't understand, you can deal with them together afterwards.

Stage five

At this point go over any difficult words that the learner has underlined. Particularly useful words can be recorded in a notebook for future revision.

Stage six

Ask a couple of follow-up questions about the text; where possible bring it back to the learner's experience. Here are some questions you can use for the text on language training.

What do you think of this method of language learning?

Do you think it's effective? Why or why not?

Would you like to learn a language this way?

This stage could very well go on for quite some time. Allow the conversation to develop, and when it begins to peter out, go on to the next stage(s).

Stage seven (optional)

If you have been working on pronunciation with your learner, you could ask them to read the passage aloud to you, as if it were a news bulletin. Give feedback on their pronunciation afterwards and go over any particularly tricky areas.

Stage eight

Take away the reading and give the learner back the card with the ten key words on it. Ask them to "retell" you the text in their own words, using the card as a prompt. Make a note of any serious mistakes in grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary and give feedback at the end. If the text isn't too long, you could repeat this stage after correction.

Stage nine

To round off your class, review with the learner what has been "taught" in that class. Go over new words, pronunciation difficulties or typical mistakes again.

How to make your own Read & Report lesson plan

One-to-one teaching is ideal in many ways because you can tailor each lesson to the learner's needs. If you want to make your own read & report lesson with your student, here's how to prepare it:

1. Find a text that is appropriate and interesting to your learner. If you have a lower level learner, you can use a text from a suitable level coursebook. Or, you can simplify a text yourself.
2. Draw out ten words from the text that reflect what the text is about. Write these on a separate card.
3. Prepare some questions (three or four) on the topic of the text to get the class started. Prepare some follow up questions too (again, three or four).

Tactical language training

Computer scientists at the University of Southern California have been developing a system to teach soldiers basic Arabic quickly. The system uses artificial intelligence and computer game techniques.

Part of the program, the “Mission Skill Builder”, is similar to language laboratories, which have been around for a long time. In the “Mission Skill Builder”, students hear words and phrases pronounced by native speakers, which they have to imitate and use in sample dialogues.

The other part of the program is the “Mission Practice Environment”. In this part, the student, wearing earphones and a microphone, controls a computer soldier and moves him around a videogame animated Lebanese village. The student meets artificial-intelligence-animated Arabic speakers who interact with the student.

What is different is that in this “game” the student speaks into a microphone and the characters can understand and respond. If the student speaks correctly (correct grammar and pronunciation, right words) then the characters will understand and respond. If the student makes mistakes, the characters will not understand and will give a different response.

Part of the test is to greet people in the village, find out their names, the name of the village, the identity of the local chief and the location of his house. The students must follow directions on how to get there. The idea is to get to the next level, and to do that the student must have the right language ability.

The full program includes around 80 hours of instruction and introduces 500 words of “Levantine” Arabic. Students also receive “culture training”: social skills, politeness, how to disagree with someone, gestures and body language.

For more information about this see the Tactical language training homepage at www.isi.edu/isd/carte/proj_tactlang/index.html