

Notes on Reading Groups in Multi-level Classes

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Reading is one language skill that can be practiced more advantageously with same-ability groups in a multi-level class. If a teacher gives the same text to a group of students with widely-ranging abilities, somebody is going to get short shrift: either the low-level students won't have time to finish reading or the high-level students will end up sitting bored while the teacher laboriously explains everything. An easy solution is to group students according to their reading ability (same ability groups) and give them different texts.

- 1) **Early in the cycle**, make sure to **do some kind of assessment of reading ability**. In a multi-level class, it could be as simple as looking at your class list and separating out the -00 students from the -50 students. Or it could involve carefully monitoring students while they read a text and respond to questions, seeing who finishes quickly and has strong comprehension. Or you could give students a text and a written set of questions to respond to, collect it and analyze the results to see who has strong or weak reading skills.
- 2) If possible, **get a volunteer**. Most volunteers, even relatively new ones, can lead a reading group effectively. Giving the volunteer some minimal direction will help (e.g., have students read the text silently, then the volunteer should read the text out loud, give the students plenty of time to do the exercises individually, then check answers together).
- 3) **Select two texts that are appropriate for your levels**. Looking at the REEP On-line Curriculum is a good way to find leveled reading texts. Or ask another teacher who has taught the level(s) before. Or ask your coordinator. Using two class sets of readers are a good way to handle this: For example, in a 100/150 class, Personal Stories 1 could go to the 100s and Personal Stories 2 can be given to the 150s. (Yes, it can be that simple!)
- 4) If possible, **find a separate space** for the two groups (i.e., a break-out room). If not, group them together on separate sides of the classroom.
- 5) (If you don't have a volunteer), **start the high group first**. Give them the page number, explain that they should work together, help each other and that you will be coming back to check on them.
- 6) **Work with the low group** to do some pre-reading, start them reading the text and then go back to check on the high group. Alternate between the groups, spending 5 to 10 minutes with each.
- 7) Don't expect the low group to get through all exercises; or **have extra work for the high group** to get through. It's not always possible for the two groups to finish exactly at the same time. But they usually benefit from the grouping.