

## UNDERSTANDING PARAGRAPH AND THREE PHASES IN READING COMPREHENSION

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### Abstract

Reading Comprehension is a mental process when the readers try to understand the meaning in the text by interpreting what have been read in order to find the idea given by the writers. The readers should pay attention for some aspects such as how they understand the words and the information from the text, understanding main ideas and details, and be able to make conclusion. Understanding three phases in reading is important to prepare reading strategies and the purpose of reading; it needs to help the readers understand the text that they read. Further, in understanding paragraph, then readers must also apply the three phases in order to make them able in finding ideas in the paragraph. Understanding paragraph and the phases are done to make the readers able in taking the meaning from the text.

*Key Words: paragraph, reading phases, and reading comprehension.*

### A. THE NATURE OF READING

Reading is a receptive skills, it is a transactional between a reader and a writer. A writer can communicate with a reader throughout a text. Reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text. An interactive process happens when the readers try to understand the text. While understanding the text, the readers want to communicate with ideas proposed by the writers.

Reading is the process of cognition, interpretation and perception of a written or printed material. As stated by Goodman in Carrell<sup>2</sup> that reading is a receptive language process; it is a psycholinguistics process in which the readers reconstruct the meaning. It happens in human minds; people receive the text and then process with their minds. In processing in their minds, they make their own interpretations of the text they read.

In reading, an individual construct meaning through a transaction with written text; it involves the readers' acting on interpreting the text and the readers' experiences, language background, and their cultural framework influence interpretation. Related to

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<sup>2</sup>Patricia L Carrell, et. al., *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 12.

this, Irwin<sup>3</sup> says that reading is a transactional between the reader and the text in a specific context that results in the creation of a new text in the mind of the reader. The goal of reading is not inferring the intended message of the author but rather creating a message that is useful to the reader. The readers read the texts and do the new interpretation based on their knowledge; they try to make new text but not far from the original text based on their interpretation and their understanding.

Furthermore, Celle-Murcia define reading as an interactive and socio cognitive process, involving a text, a reader, and social context in which the activity of reading takes place<sup>4</sup>. People do not read with an empty mind, they have already had any opinions or schemes of it in their mind. Thus, reading is stated as an interactive process, because in reading the readers communicate with the written or printed text. By reading the reader may know the ideas of the writer.

Then, He Ji Seng<sup>5</sup> states that reading is a process of communication from the writer to the reader by understanding the written or printed materials. The process in reading happens when the readers try to communicate with the writers through their writing, they try to understand the text well.

In addition, Barbara Taylor et. al.<sup>6</sup> tell reading is a language process. It is also a social and cognitive process. They also state that reading is an interactive process in which the reader, the text, and the context within which we read come together to determine the nature quality of our comprehension. The process happens when the readers read the text to get the information.

To get a better sense of the complexity of reading, read what some experts in the field have said about the reading process:

1. *What do we read? The message is not something given in advance--or given at all-- but something created by interaction between writers and readers as participants in a particular communicative situation*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Irwin, Judith Westphal. *Teaching Reading Comprehension Processes* (New York: A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1991) p. 8-9

<sup>4</sup>Celce - Murcia, Marianne. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (New York: Heinle & Heinle. 2001)

<sup>5</sup>He Ji Seng. A Cognitive Model For Teaching Reading Comprehension. *English Teaching Forum* vol.38. <http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol38/no4/p12.html>, retrieved on February 12, 2007 p.1

<sup>6</sup>Barbara Taylor et. al. *Reading Difficulties*. (New York: Oxford. 1988.) p. 224.

<sup>7</sup>Read more in Roy Harris. *Rethinking Writing* (2000)

2. *Reading is asking questions of printed text. And reading with comprehension becomes a matter of getting your questions answered*<sup>8</sup>.

In reading, there are the messages that the readers want to get. It got by interaction with the text written. The readers also try to answer some questions in their minds related to the text. It is impossible reading without getting the meaning, eventually it is academic reading.

Why do you read? There will be the reasons for reading. Besides getting information, it can be for enjoyable activities. The purposes<sup>9</sup> of reading can be to learn overall concepts such as background information to help you understand the next topic; to learn detailed information; to learn how to do a procedure; or to evaluate the author's perspective or compare it with another author's point of view. What ever your purpose for reading, it will be needed for you to get information, and it will need reading strategies to find the information from its purpose.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that reading is an interactive process between the readers and the writers through their writing that happened when the readers try to understand and reconstruct meanings from the written or printed texts. So, reading is an interactive process that happens in human minds to reconstruct the meaning or to get the information for what they have read.

## **B. READING COMPREHENSION**

As stated above that reading is not just saying the words, but also to understand what we read, or getting the idea; it is related to comprehension. Hornby states that comprehension is the power of understanding.<sup>10</sup> It is the ability to understand a language. In addition, Richard states comprehension is the process by which a person understanding the meaning of written or spoken language clearly.<sup>11</sup> Comprehension is the ability to understand the meaning from written or spoken language.

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<sup>8</sup>Read more in Frank Smith, *Reading Without Nonsense*, (1997).

<sup>9</sup>Reading Strategies retrieved from <http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffy/library/study/read.htm>.

<sup>10</sup>A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English*, p. 324.

<sup>11</sup>Richard A. Renandya, *Language Teaching Methodology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), p. 54.

Further, Young in Nadrah<sup>12</sup> states that comprehension focuses on reading instruction, such as: (1) understanding words and building vocabulary, (2) understanding sentences, sentence structure, and syntax, and (3) understanding paragraph, which include finding the main idea and topic sentences, finding detail, and drawing conclusion and interpretation what you read. Further, in comprehension at least needs three skills which should be possessed as a reader; knowledge of words forms and their meanings, the ability to understand the sentence in a paragraph, the ability to see the main thought of the writer and get the general ideas of a piece of reading material.

Talking about reading comprehension itself, Junaini states reading comprehension involves getting meaning from the printed page.<sup>13</sup> Devine in Junaini also gives the statement that reading comprehension is process using syntactic and semantic information found in printed text to reconstruct in the readers' mind.<sup>14</sup> Reading comprehension is the ability to understand information presented in written form. It is the process of getting meaning from print. It is not a passive receptive activity, but requires the readers to be active and thinking. Reading comprehension is a complex skill includes understanding the text and the components inside. It is the process of understanding the text to get the meaning.

The other ideas about reading comprehension are based on process and level of comprehension. Based on process comes from Clark and Clark<sup>15</sup> who states that there are two processes of comprehension; *construction process* in which the way listeners construct an interpretation of the sentence from the speakers' words, and *utilization process* which concerned with how the listeners utilize the interpretation for further purpose for registering new information, answering questions, following orders, registering promises, and the like.

There are also literal, interpretative, and applied levels of comprehension.<sup>16</sup> She quoted from some sources. Literal comprehension is the readers deal with decoding the symbol use in the text. Interpretative comprehension is the readers try to grasp the ideas

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<sup>12</sup>Nadrah, The Contribution of Reading Strategies and Vocabulary Mastery to Reading Comprehension. (Unpublished Thesis). (Padang: UNP. 2004)

<sup>13</sup>Junaini, The Contribution of Grammar and Vocabulary Mastery towards Reading Comprehension of the Third Year Students. (Unpublished Thesis). (Padang: UNP. 2004) p. 25

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>15</sup>Clark, Herbert H and Eve V Clark. 1977. *Psychology and Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich International Edition. p. 45.

<sup>16</sup>Nadrah, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

to interpret what they have been read. And applied comprehension is the readers can apply what they have been read.

Based on explanations above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is mental process in which the readers try to understand the meaning in the text by interpreting what have been read in order to find the idea given by the writers. In reading comprehension, the readers should pay attention for some aspects such as how they understand the words and the information from the text, understanding main ideas and details, and be able to make conclusion. Reading comprehension has aims; they are understanding the given passage or stories and getting ideas or opinion from the text.

### **C. READING PHASES**

There are three phases that the readers do in their reading activities; pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading.

#### **1. Pre-Reading**

Pre-reading is the important phase that must be done by the students. It needs to be done better by the readers to make them easier in activating their background knowledge to help them understand the text. Pre -reading makes comprehension easier and better; the more difficult the material, the more prereading will help the comprehension.<sup>17</sup>

Like stated by Vaezi<sup>18</sup> who explained that pre-reading used for providing the necessary background information to the reader to facilitate comprehension and can lighten students' cognitive burden while reading. Then, pre-reading is a way to familiarize the readers quickly with the organization and content of the materials.<sup>19</sup> It involved getting a quick impression or overview of what the readers going to read before beginning to read. By pre-reading the students or readers will be able to read faster and follow the author's train of thought more easily. There are some strategies that can be used in pre-reading such as skimming and scanning.

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<sup>17</sup>Horace Judson and Schaill, William S. *The Techniques of reading* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1972).

<sup>18</sup>Shahin Vaezi. *Theories of reading 2* retrieved from [http://www.teaching\\_english.org.uk/thinkJreading.tips.html](http://www.teaching_english.org.uk/thinkJreading.tips.html) . retrieved on February 13, 2007.

<sup>19</sup>Kathleen T. McWhorter, *Efficlent and Flexible Reading*, (New York: The Lehigh Press, mc, 1992), p. 25.

Thus, it can be said that pre-reading is the introduction of the readers to the text to know the information firstly, so that they can build their map about the text; or activate their schemata about the text.

## 2. During Reading

During reading is the activity that done by the readers when they read the text. During reading or while-reading guides students through the text, makes sense of complex text, and considering the relationships among ideas or characters in the text.<sup>20</sup> Then, Vaezi states that while-reading consists of summarizing, reacting, questioning, arguing, evaluating, and placing a text within one's own experience.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it can be stated that during reading is the activities in reading to get information in which the readers make sense of the text; they also make the relationship between the text to their background knowledge.

## 3. Post Reading

The last is post-reading that extends ideas and information on the text are well understood by the readers.<sup>22</sup> Post-reading is also checking students' comprehension and leading the students to a deeper analysis of the text.<sup>23</sup> This phase is about re-comprehend the text; it is to check the comprehending that has built in pre and during reading activities.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that pre-reading stage used for helping students in activating their background knowledge and provide the students with new information to make them comprehending text well, while-reading stage happens in reading process to help readers in understanding the text and facilitate them the actual reading passages, and post-reading stage helps them to check and evaluate their comprehension.

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<sup>20</sup>Celce-Murcia, Marianne, *Op. Cit.*, p. 191 – 192.

<sup>21</sup>Shahin Vaezi. *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>22</sup>Celce-Murcia, Marianne, *Op. Cit.*, p. 191 – 192.

<sup>23</sup>Shahin Vaezi. *Loc. Cit.*

## D. UNDERSTANDING PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences develops one main idea.<sup>24</sup> In a paragraph, some sentences relate each other. The sentences that develop a paragraph must have a related idea; while in a paragraph only has one main idea, one thing that explains or develops in a paragraph. A paragraph has three major structural parts<sup>25</sup>: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Other ideas given by Zainil<sup>26</sup> that stated in a paragraph consist of four essential parts: topic, main ideas, details, and transition. These parts will be discussed in this chapter.

### 1. Topic Sentence And Main Ideas

Every good paragraph has a topic sentence, which clearly states the topic and the controlling idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph. It is the one thing a paragraph about.<sup>27</sup> Every sentence in a paragraph in some way discusses or explains this topic. If you had chosen a title for the paragraph, the one or two words you would choose are topic. Topic is also not only names the topic of the paragraph, but it also limited in one or two areas that can be discussed completely in the space of single paragraph. The specific idea is called controlling idea; it is to control the idea that want to be developed by the writer. One thing that you must remember is topic sentence is a complete sentence, which contains a subject, a verb, and (usually) a complement. It is usually (but not always) the first sentence in the paragraph.<sup>28</sup> A topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph.

Topic sentence indicates the main idea of a paragraph and is the most general statement in the paragraph. A main idea sentence is the most general statement the author makes about the topic or subject of the paragraph. The main idea generally describes or “cover” the detail in the paragraph.<sup>29</sup> It is what the author wants you to know about the topic. It is the important idea that the writers

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<sup>24</sup>Alice, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup>Zainil, *Reading Theories*, (Padang: UNP Press, 2007), p. 39.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>Alice, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>Kimmelman, et.al, *Reading and Study Skills: A Rhetorical Approach*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1984). p. 193.

develops throughout the paragraph. Therefore, the topic sentence gives only the main idea, not the detail information; it states the most general statement in the paragraph.

The position of the topic sentences can be located anywhere in the paragraph. It can be in the first, in the middle, in the last sentence in a paragraph; it may also be in the first and last sentence of the paragraph.

## **2. Supporting Sentences**

Supporting sentences<sup>30</sup> develop the topic sentence. Supporting sentences can be stated as supporting details or supporting information. The detail information can be concrete support and explanation of the topic sentence. They explain and give information about main idea in the paragraph; they also give explanation about the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples, facts, statistics, or quotations. Supporting sentences are the sentences that support the main ideas or the topic of the paragraph. They support or explain the ideas given in the main ideas.

A paragraph contains concrete support for the topic sentence; you must make your topic sentence by using specific and factual supporting details.<sup>31</sup> Opinions that stated by the writers must be supported by the concrete support that can support the opinions become the believable information. The key details directly explain the main idea. Other details may provide additional information, offer an example, or further explanation of the key details.

In conclusion, supporting sentences can be stated as supporting details. They support the main ideas by giving explanation, examples, or others to make the paragraph develop.

## **3. Concluding Sentence**

A concluding sentence is not absolutely necessary, but it is very often helpful to the reader because it signals the end of the paragraph and because it reminds the reader for important points.<sup>32</sup> Concluding sentence is stated at the end of the

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<sup>30</sup>Alice, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>32</sup>Alice, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

paragraph. It is the conclusion of the paragraph. Thus, concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember.

A concluding sentence serves three purposes:

- a. It signals the end of the paragraph. (Use an end-of-paragraph signal such as “In conclusion,” “In summary,” “Finally,” etc.)
- b. It summarizes the main points of the paragraph.
- c. It gives a final comment on the topic and leaves the reader with the most important ideas to think about.

Such in the paragraph about gold above, the concluding sentence is ‘In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty, but also for its utility’. The concluding sentence can repeat the main idea of the topic sentence in different words.

Example:

1. I have been wondering if homework is necessary. (TS) I think we should have homework because it helps us to learn and revise our work. (SS) Homework helps people who aren’t very smart to remember what they have learned. (SS) Homework is really good because it helps with our education. (SS) But, many times, doing homework is not a great idea. (SS) I think we shouldn’t have homework because I like to go out after school to a restaurant or the movies. (SS) Sometimes homework is boring and not important. (SS) I think homework is bad because I like to play and discuss things with my family. (CS)
2. **(TS) There are three reasons why Canada is one of the best countries in the world.** (ss.MJ.1) First, Canada has an excellent health care system. (SS.MN.mj.1) All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. (SS.MJ.2) Second, Canada has a high standard of education. (SS.MN.mj.2) Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. (ss.mj.3) Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. (SS.MN.MJ.3) Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. (CS) As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live.

**Notes:**

- TS : Topic Sentence
- SS : Supporting sentence
- SS. MN. : Supporting sentence minor
- SS. MJ. : Supporting sentence major
- CS : Concluding sentence

**CONCLUSION**

Reading comprehension is understanding meaning from the text that have been read. There are three phases in reading; pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading. The three stages must be done by the readers. Further, understanding paragraph is one way to understand text completely. Paragraph consists of topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. By understanding paragraph will make the readers understand text well, because paragraph is part of text.

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