

Getting Input



What is Extensive Reading?

When students read in a language they are learning, they often read slowly and carefully, perhaps stopping to look up words in a dictionary or identify all the instances of a particular verb tense. This is referred to as careful or intensive reading.

In contrast, **extensive reading involves reading easier material, but more of it:**

- The idea is to **read material that is interesting and relatively easy to understand.**
- **That way you can read quickly, without stopping to look up words or re-read** a paragraph that you didn't quite catch – the way you would read if you were reading for pleasure in your native language.
- With extensive reading, **you are focused on the *content***, rather than linguistic elements like vocabulary words or verb tenses.

Extensive reading can benefit language learners in a number of ways:

- It can **increase your reading speed and reading comprehension.** You will be exposed to large amounts of language, and your vocabulary will grow as you encounter new words and reinforce already-learned vocabulary. (As a child, you probably learned much of your native language vocabulary through reading.)
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- Extensive reading **can also help with grammar**, since you will come across many examples of grammatical patterns used in context.
- You might notice that **your listening, speaking, and writing skills benefit as well**.
- Since you should choose materials that you find easy and interesting to read, **extensive reading can also be fun and help keep you motivated** to continue learning the language.

This is not to say that you should abandon careful or intensive reading altogether. But it is important to understand the difference so that you can choose appropriate materials and strategies for both intensive and extensive reading. A text that might work well for intensive reading could be too difficult for extensive reading. If that's the case, find something easier for your extensive reading, and have fun with it!

In some Five College Center for the Study of World Languages courses, **intermediate and advanced students choose reading and listening materials** as part of their weekly assignments. It is usually most effective to **do a mix of both careful or intensive reading and extensive reading**.

Even if it is not part of your specific assignments, you might find extensive reading to be a helpful (and enjoyable) supplement to your other language-learning activities, or a fun way to help maintain your language abilities during breaks. As with other language-learning activities, **it is most effective to spread your reading out over time** (ideally doing a little bit every day, rather than leaving it all for the day before your conversation session).

You may also want to read [Choosing Materials for Extensive Reading](#).

Choosing Materials for Extensive Reading

When choosing material for extensive reading (see: [What is Extensive Reading?](#)), **there are two main requirements:**

- The material needs to be **easy enough for you to read quickly**.
- The material needs to be **interesting and enjoyable for you to read**.

How Hard Should the Material Be?

You should choose material that is relatively easy for you, so that you can read quickly without stopping often to look up words in a dictionary:

- You may not understand every single word, **but you should be able to follow the story or understand the main points** based on words that you know and words that you can guess easily from the context.
 - If you start reading a piece and find that you can't follow it without relying heavily on a dictionary, **you might still be able to use that material for intensive reading, but you should choose something easier for extensive reading**.
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Pick Something Interesting

It's also important to **pick material that is interesting to you**:

- There is no need to read about politics or economics if you're really more interested in music, sports, or food.
- If you *do* really love reading about politics in English and you think you are at a high enough level to understand political news in the language you're studying, then go ahead and give it a try.
- If the content is interesting and engaging for you, **you will learn more and be more motivated to keep reading**.

If you start reading something and find that it is either too difficult or too boring, then stop and find something else to read. **You do not need to finish reading something just because you started it.** In fact, you will probably gain much more by switching to easier or more interesting material than by forcing yourself to struggle through something that is frustrating or boring.

Types of Materials

As for the type of material, there are many possibilities, such as:

- Children's books (picture books, easy readers, young adult novels)
- News articles (including articles on social/cultural topics)
- Blogs
- Magazines (print or online)
- Song lyrics
- Recipes
- Book or movie reviews
- Short stories

Your selections will depend on what materials are available in the language you are studying, as well as your personal interests and your level in the language. **But as long as you read something that is easy and interesting for you, you should get something out of it.**

Some Tips for Starting Out

When you first begin, it is helpful to start with something familiar:

- If you decide to read **a book**, you can choose one that you've already read in English or that you've seen in a movie version.
 - For **an article**, pick one on a topic that you know a lot about.
 - [In his book *Fluent Forever*](#), Gabriel Wyner recommends **reading and listening simultaneously**. You could do this by playing a video or audio clip while reading a transcript of it. This might help you to stay focused on the story or overall meaning instead of getting caught up on the occasional unfamiliar word, and it will also reinforce the sounds and rhythm of the language.
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Extensive Listening

Extensive listening is similar to extensive reading (see: [What is Extensive Reading?](#)), **except with audio or video materials instead of written texts**:

- Instead of listening carefully to a small amount of material, you **choose easy material and listen to a lot of it**.
- The material should be **easy enough that you can understand most of it comfortably**, without having to go back and listen multiple times or look up new words in a dictionary, and without subtitles.

You can find more information about extensive listening [here](#).

Choosing Materials for Extensive Listening

As with extensive reading (see: [Choosing Materials for Extensive Reading](#)), there **are two main criteria when choosing materials** for extensive listening:

- The material should be easy enough that you can understand most of it comfortably (without subtitles).
- The material should be interesting and enjoyable for you to listen to or watch.

If you start listening to something and find that it is either too difficult or too boring, then stop and find something else to listen to. **You do not need to finish something just because you started it**. In fact, you will probably gain much more by switching to easier or more interesting material than by forcing yourself to struggle through something that is frustrating or boring.

Types of Materials

As for the type of material, there are many possibilities, such as:

- TV series
- Movies
- [CultureTalk videos on LangMedia](#) (with transcripts and translations)
- YouTube videos
- Cooking videos
- TV news
- Podcasts
- Radio
- Music

Your selections will depend on what materials are available in the language you are studying, as well as your personal interests and your level in the language. **But as long as you listen to or watch something that is easy and interesting for you, you should get something out of it**.

NOTE: When you first begin, **video may be easier than just audio**, because body language and other visual clues will help you understand what is happening:

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- It is helpful to **start with something familiar**, such as a TV series or movie where you know

the story.

- If you don't know the story already, you may be able to **find a synopsis of it** to read before watching.
- For something that's not a story, **choose a topic that you know a lot about**. (If you have a copy of [Gabriel Wyner's book *Fluent Forever*](#), he gives some tips about choosing listening materials in Chapter 6.)

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