

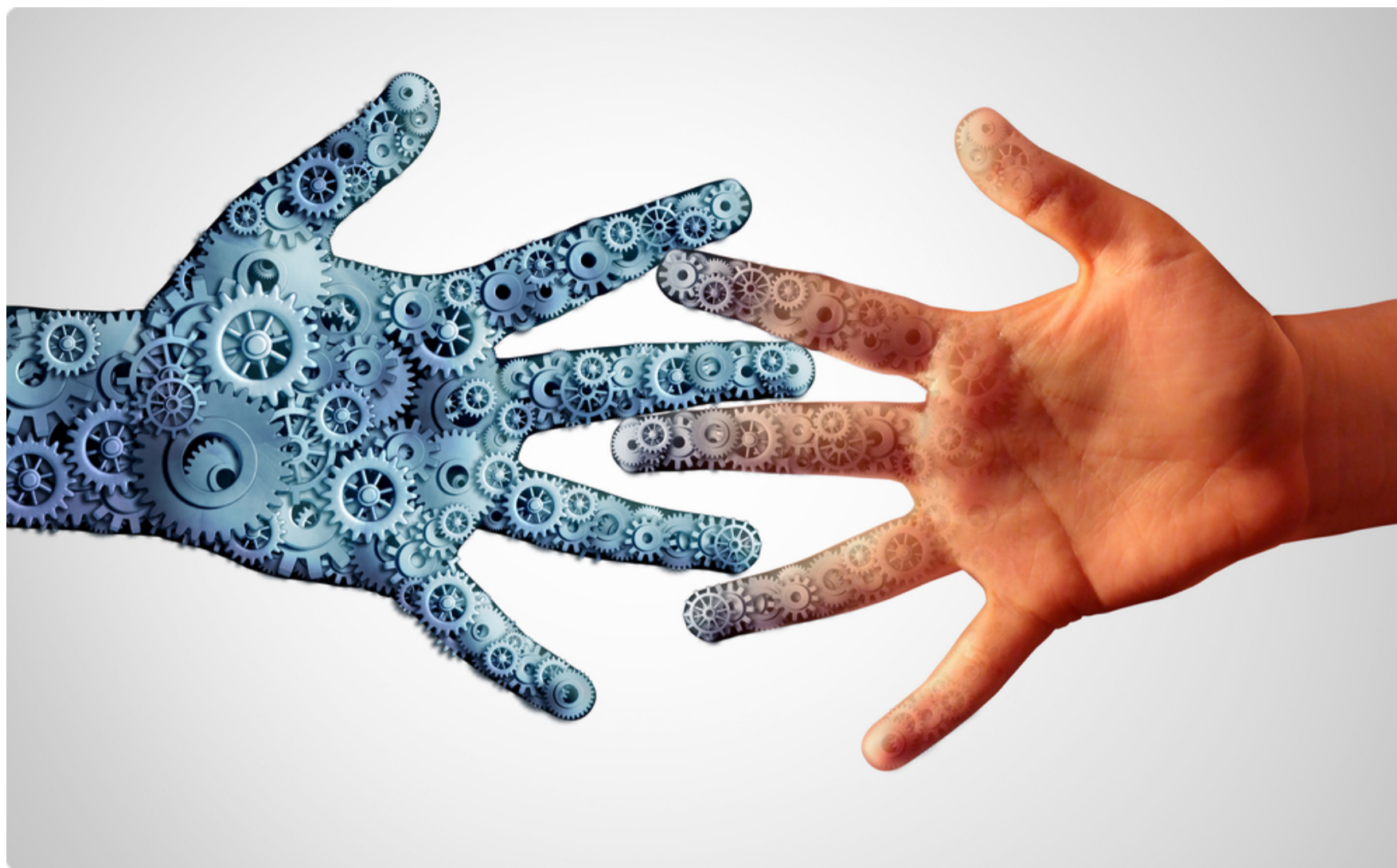
By Joseph Poulshock, PhD, Editor ReadOasis.com

10-Point Guide for Big, Easy Reading Programs

For Teachers



How do you start a big, easy reading program?



The Singularity

When the singularity comes, we may hook up our heads to computer networks and download Shakespeare, cookbooks, and foreign languages into our brains. I hope the process works wirelessly, so I don't have to stick cables into my skull. But until that day, big reading still works as a great way to download big linguistic data into our heads.

Research clearly shows that learners can effectively download English into their brains by extensive (BIG) and EASY reading. Fortunately, we can easily start and manage a big reading program. Below I share a 10-Point guide for doing so with ReadOasis.com, but this guide works for any reading system, and with any class, group, company, or school.

One – Know the Benefits of Big Reading.

Teachers, trainers, and students need to know the benefits of big reading. Big reading works to improve all language skills! But we often forget that big reading also helps



Three – Get Time on Task

Students need enough time to read -- this often includes regular time in class. And it will include regular or daily reading outside of class. Students or employees often enjoy graded readers or ReadOasis during their commute on public transportation.

Four – Start Easy

In Japan, learners know "yakudoku" translation-style reading. They work with hard texts, where they know 70 to 80% of the words (way too hard even for native speakers), so they learn to hate reading. **So, start them easy, and we define easy as 98% vocabulary coverage -- where learners know 98% of the words in a text.**

To help learners start easy, bring a set of easy books to class, or use easy [ReadOasis CEFR A1](#) stories. Have students read for 15-20 minutes for pleasure. Do this for a few weeks, so learners get the idea of *easy reading for pleasure*. Then learners can choose easy books from the library or easy ReadOasis stories to read in class. Do free reading in class. Check with learners to make sure the books and stories are not too hard. If a student chooses a

Move up levels!



text that is too hard, remind him of the "easy" principle. He needs to know 98% of the words, so he can understand without using a dictionary and so he can guess words from context. Remember that reading works as a powerful learning tool, so in-class reading stands as a good use of class time.

Five – Keep Reading at the Right Level and Move Up

Teach and remind learners to keep reading at their level till they know about 100% of the words, then encourage them to move to the next level. If the next level becomes too hard, they can move back down again. If you don't have a graded reader library, students can read stories at ReadOasis. Use our 10-level CEFR system or 5-level vocabulary system to help them read at the right level until they are ready to move up. (ReadOasis also allows learners to track word counts for books that they read.)

Please always remember: Students need to know 98% of the words in the text (only 2 unknown words per page in a book). At the outer limit, they need to know 95% of the words, but this makes reading much harder. If students read at a wrong level, they will lose motivation and stop reading or begin to hate it.

Read BIG on purpose!

How do they know their level? For the easy answer, learners should meet only about 2 unknown words per page in a book. For stories at ReadOasis, when they finish a story, they click **"I read this story honestly,"** and they see the word count of the story. Then they can count the words that they don't know and calculate the percentage of unknown words. For a 500 word story, they should only meet 10 unknown words.

Researchers often recommend a levels test like the [New Vocabulary Levels Test](#) (McLean & Kramer). The test help learners know their vocabulary level and their reading level. Each level of the test presents 24 questions from a 1,000 word band. If a learner gets 95% correct on Level 1 and Level 2, but only 50% on Level 3, then she has a big enough vocabulary to read at Level 2 (Step 2 at ReadOasis).

Six: Read Big on Purpose

As students read at their level, they read **on purpose** -- to get helpful and interesting information (non-fiction) and to enjoy stories (fiction). I always remind students that "reading works as the best way to update the software of your mind. Until you can enter the Matrix and take a pill to know English, then reading works best for mental software



updates!" For big reading, students who read the most win. They don't compete against others but against themselves to learn and read as much as possible.

Big reading often includes tracking, especially at schools. Track books, but ideally track how many words learners read. Set a goal of 5,000 words per week (one book a week?) for a top grade. This will take slow readers about 50 minutes per week. Set word count goals for the term based on this weekly goal. The more a student reads, the higher their grades. Check students' progress on a weekly or regular basis.

At ReadOasis, we use a ring gaming system to encourage reading. Readers set daily goals for story word counts at ReadOasis. If they reach their daily goal, they get a ring. We also use a ring game for books. If they reach their goal, they get a ring.

Give students freedom to choose, but also recommend good stories or books they will find helpful and enjoyable. Choice brings freedom, so learners can read and enjoy what they like. But learners can benefit from good recommendations, too. The best big reading teachers know how to recommend lots of good stories and books that match the interests and needs of individual learners. Learners need to know good stories and books are



waiting for them! When they have a "home run" reading experience, they may feel more motivation to read big!

Seven – Read for fluency

English learners need to improve reading speed. They can do this in a speed reading course. We have 3 speed reading courses at ReadOasis. For reading fluency, learners need to know 100% of the words. They cannot practice fluency when they work with words or grammar they don't know.

In a speed reading course, students read a story with a timer. They note their reading speed. Then they take a quiz, aiming to get about 80% of the answers correct on the quiz. If they get 100%, they are reading too slowly and not working to improve speed. In the speed reading course, students should increase their speed, ideally up to about 200 words per minute. But some learners could be happy to reach speeds of 150 or 175, too. See the [speed reading courses at ReadOasis](#), which have instructions about how to do them.

Measure progress!



Eight – Measure Progress

We can help learners see improvement by (1) measuring reading speed in a speed reading course, by (2) weekly checking, tracking, and charting of word counts so they can see progress, by (3) talking in groups or "book clubs" about what they learned and how it helps them or gave them enjoyment, or (4) by giving them a way to reflect on what they read so they remember valuable information or new language. In this case, we can use "reflection flashcards." For each story or book, students make a simple flashcard. They quiz themselves on words, phrases, or ideas from a story or book. (5) At ReadOasis, teachers can **track stories for listening**. See below.

Though some experts say, "big reading is all you need," and it may be enough for independent learners who want a simple way to maintain or grow their English ability. But for general consensus, most experts suggest big reading stands as one essential element in a good language course or plan for independent learning. Paul Nation says big reading stands as the most important improvement a teacher can make in a language course. It follows that big reading works as the best way learners can improve how they learn English.



Promote BIG Listening!

Nation suggests the 4-strands as a guideline for planning a language learning course. (1) Meaning-focused input. (2) Meaning-focused output. (3) Fluency development (4) Language focus. The 4-strands balance language study with these essential elements. Notice that language focus (grammar and structure) do not stand in the center. Rather, we see meaning-focused input and output at the center. And fortunately, we can use big reading for meaningful input and output. Reading gives us good things to talk about! We can use stories from ReadOasis for many different output, fluency, and language focus activities. See examples of "algorithmic" activities at my teacher education site: [Elemental Linguistics](#).

Nine – Promote Big Listening

We can promote big listening as we do big reading. Many graded readers come with audio. At ReadOasis all our stories play audio with a high quality AI voice produced by Amazon Polly. In our research using [AI voices for listening](#), learners have graded Polly as about as natural as a human voice.



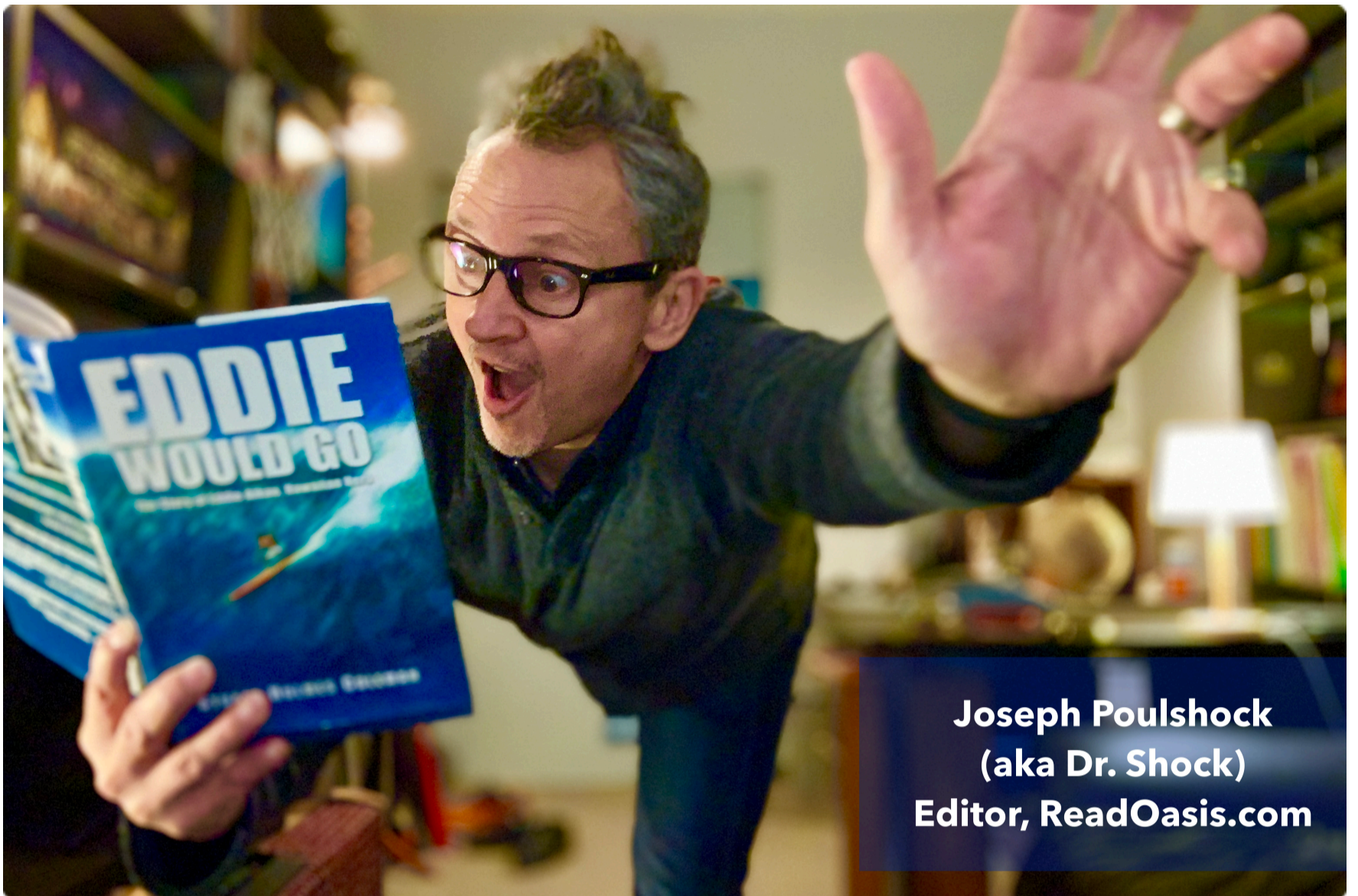
A reading BEE -- community of readers

For big listening, learners ideally listen at one level lower than their reading level, so for listening they need to know almost 100% of the words in a text. As they listen to stories at ReadOasis, they can track audio stories for word count. At first, they may feel that the voice speaks too fast, even for easy stories. But our experience shows us that as they keep listening, they will get a feel for the voice and start to understand it well.

At ReadOasis, teachers and trainers can require a listening assignment. For example, over a term, (A) the teacher requires learners to listen to 20 stories. (B) Students keep track of the stories on a tracking sheet. (C) For each story, they give a subjective rating for how well they understood it on a scale of 1 to 5. (D) Alternatively, they can take quizzes for the stories that they listened to. *Note: not all stories at ReadOasis have quizzes.*

Ten – Remember BEE stands for Big, Easy, and Enjoyable

The word BEE gives us the simplest summary of big reading. One nuance of "bee" means "a meeting for communal work or amusement." That works for reading. Readers commune with writers. When I read one of my favorite authors, I share "community" with him. Readers commune with characters. When I read Harry Potter, I meet with Harry and his



Joseph Poulshock
(aka Dr. Shock)
Editor, ReadOasis.com

friends. And readers commune with other readers as we discuss and enjoy books together. We benefit from joining a "Reading Bee," where reading is:

BIG: Students read big. A big weekly goal might start at 5,000 words per week. A challenging mid-term goal could stand at 300,000 words for one academic year, or one full year. At a reading speed of 125 words per minute, a reader can read 300,000 words in 365 days at 6.6 minutes per day. When readers reach 300,000 words, they cross a threshold for big reading, they gain confidence, fluency, and measurable results. Longer term goals can include 1 Million words, or 2 Million words (which will equal one year of study abroad).

EASY: Students read at their level. They know 98% of the words on every page. This allows guessing from context and promotes enjoyment. **ENJOYABLE:** Students read for pleasure; *big reading simulates play*. Enjoyment includes freedom of choice, but it also includes getting good recommendations from teachers and other learners. If they start something they don't enjoy, they can put it down and read something else. They can find enjoyment in good stories or in reading non-fiction that helps them learn about happiness, health, wealth, or wisdom.

For the original Top 10 Principles of Extensive reading, see Day and Bamford's famous journal article: [Top Ten Principles for Teaching Extensive Reading](#), or the [Extensive Reading Top 10](#), a short summary produced by the Extensive Reading Foundation.

The author Joseph Poulshock works as a Professor of English Linguistics at Senshu University in the Department of Intercultural Communication. He also does teacher education at Meiji Gakuin University and serves as an Editor at ReadOasis.com. In his free time, Joseph likes to read books, walk his dog, and play ukulele.