

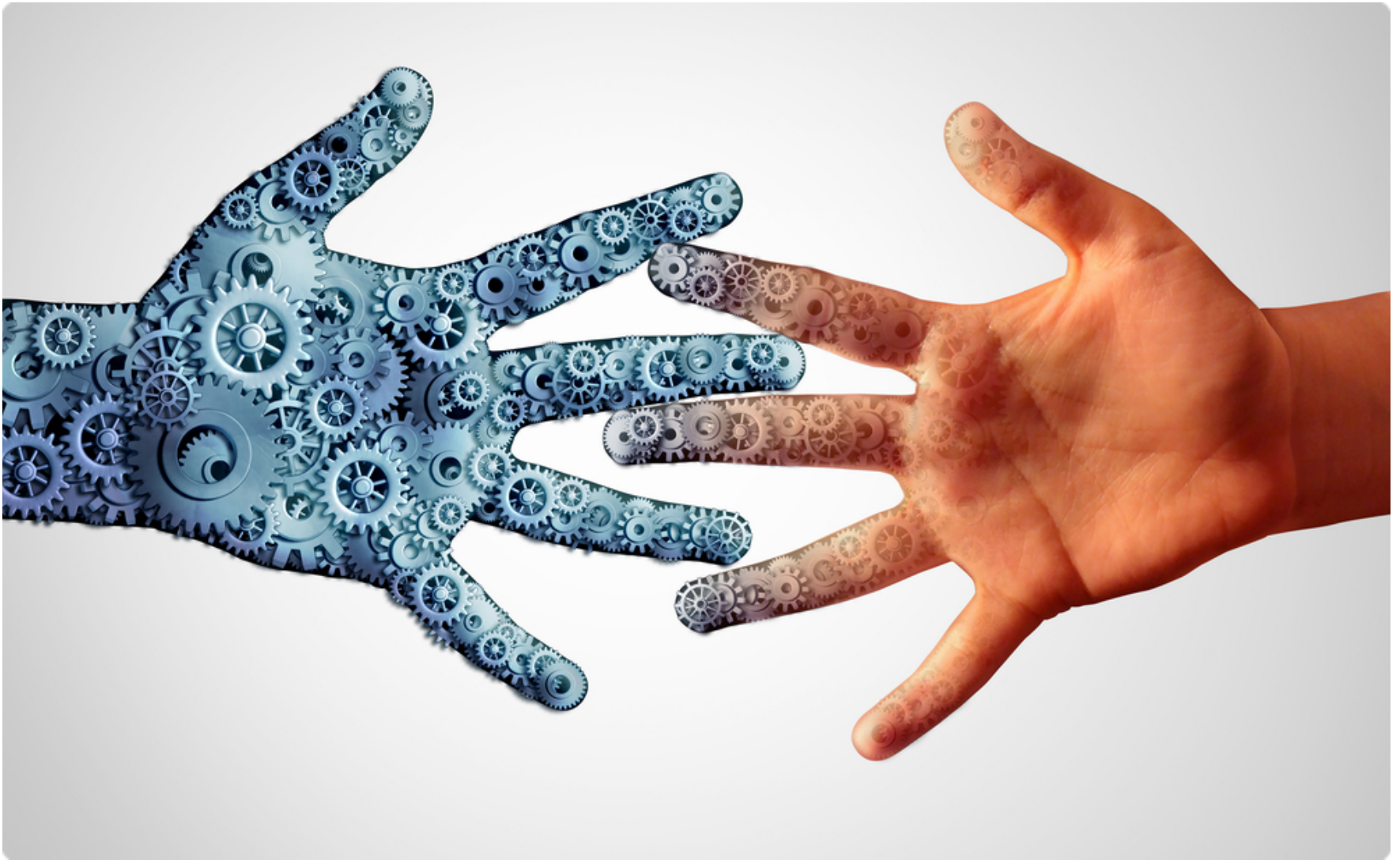
By Joseph Poulshock, PhD, Editor ReadOasis.com

10-Point Guide for Big, Easy Reading Programs

For Teachers (2024 Edition)



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 languages into our brains. I hope the process works wirelessly, so I don't have to stick cables into my head. But until that day, big, easy reading works as a great way to download big linguistic data into the human brain.

Research clearly shows that your 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



language learners learn about how to be happier, healthier, wealthier, and wiser. Reading fiction fosters enjoyment and empathy for people. We can share the benefits of big reading with learners in many ways. For example, they can (a) see stories or [videos](#) from ReadOasis that summarize the benefits of reading -- snippets from research; (b) they can see [quotes](#) from famous readers, writers, and leaders about the power of reading; (c) they can see [testimonials](#) and case studies from learners who have benefited from big reading.

Two – Get an Analog or Digital Library

Students need enough books, texts, and stories at the right level. ReadOasis has 10 CEFR levels with about 2,000 stories, totaling about 1 million words. About 1,000 of our top readers have read over 300 million words. ReadOasis works as a library of stories, but at ReadOasis, learners can track the books they read, too. Ideally, your library should offer graded content designed for language learners because these learners will often find texts too difficult that are written for native speaking children and young people.



Start easy, and
take enough time.

Three – Get Time on Task

Students need time to read -- this often includes regular time in class. Some teachers might consider it a waste of time to do silent reading in class. But remember, reading works as a most effective way to learn English because it simulates life in the real world. When students read in class, we show them the value of reading. Also, students read in class in the most successful big reading programs in the world. So, if possible, try to set aside class time for big, easy reading. Students also need to do regular or daily reading outside of class. We can teach them to "read in the schema" when they have little openings of free time. For example, on their mobile devices, learners can enjoy graded readers or ReadOasis stories during their commute on public transportation.

Four – Start Easy

In Japan, learners know "yakudoku" translation-style reading. They work with hard texts, where their vocabulary covers only 70 to 80% of the words, so they learn to hate reading. This level of vocabulary coverage is even too hard for native speakers. **The point: start**



learners easy! We define easy as 98% vocabulary coverage -- where learners know 98% of the words in a text. Let's call this the "98% Magic Number Rule."

To start easy, bring a set of easy books to class, or use [ReadOasis CEFR A1](#) stories. Experts recommend the super-easy [Oxford Reading Tree](#) books, even for young adults. Have students read for 15-20 minutes for pleasure. Do this for a few weeks, so learners experience *easy reading for pleasure*. Then learners can choose easy books from the library or ReadOasis stories to read in class. When you do free reading in class, check with learners to make sure the books and stories are not too hard. If students choose texts that are too hard, remind them of the 98% Magic Number Rule, so they can understand without a dictionary and guess words from context. Again, 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 in that level. 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

A person is lying on their back on a sandy beach, holding an open book high above their head with their right hand. They are wearing a white shirt and a straw hat. The background shows a clear blue sky and a turquoise ocean. The text "Read big with a purpose!" is overlaid on the left side of the image in white.

Read big with a purpose!

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. For graded readers, follow this rule: **Only 2-3 unknown words per page**. At ReadOasis, learners can use our **Smart Level Check** to know if a story is too hard, too easy, or just right. The **Smart Level Check** also recommends the right level of stories for learners.

Please remember that the "98% Magic Number Rule" is based on research. For pleasure reading, learners can know 95% of the words on every page, but this makes reading harder and less enjoyable. For intensive reading, which I call "study reading," learners can know 90% of the words on a page. But this stands at the outer limit of coverage and works best only for shorter texts. For big, easy reading, if students read at a wrong level, they will lose motivation, stop reading, or begin to hate it. So, follow the 98% Magic Number Rule!

Six: Read Big with a Purpose

As students read at their level, they read **on purpose**. They can read on purpose in two ways (1) to get helpful and interesting information (non-fiction) and (2) to simply 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!" Reading fiction also works as the most common "flow experience," where readers get lost in a story and forget about the time. For big reading, students who read the most win. Every student can compete – not against others – but against his or her "best-self" to learn and read as much as possible.

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. (See Step 8 for setting goals and measuring progress.) When learners make a game of goal-setting, they read and play with a fuller purpose. That's the goal of our ring gaming system! You can also make a game out of reading in your classes. If students like the idea, the student who reads the most in a term can receive a book as reward. Research suggests that books work as great rewards for reading where the reward is more and more reading for pleasure!

As students read big, we want them to feel the freedom to choose books. Because they read on purpose (to enjoy), they can quit a book that they dislike. At the same time, teachers can recommend good stories or books that students may find helpful and



***Read for fluency and
improve speed!***

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 70-80% 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



**Set word count goals,
and track word count
progress.**

words per minute. But some learners could be happy to reach speeds of 150 or 175, too. See the [speed reading courses at ReadOasis](#).

Eight – Set Goals and Measure Progress

We can help learners improve by (1) measuring reading speed in a speed reading course, by (2) weekly checking, tracking, and charting 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. For reflection, 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.

Big reading often includes goals and tracking, especially at schools. We can track books, but ideally, we track words. 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 the famous SEG tutorial school



in Tokyo, students read an average of 500,000 words per year, and this includes a lot of reading during class! At SEG, they want 50% of learners to read 600,000 words in 2 years. In my university classes, I require students to read 150,000 words per term. Big reading counts as 30% of the grade, so if a student reads 150,000 words, she gets a full 30 points out of her whole grade. Students who read less get fewer points.

Nine – Promote Big Listening

We can promote big listening through big reading. Many graded readers come with audio. At ReadOasis, students can listen to all of our stories 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.

For big listening, learners ideally listen at one level lower than their reading level, meaning that they need to know almost 100% of the words in a listening 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. Alternatively, they can take quizzes for stories with audio. *Note: Not all stories at ReadOasis have quizzes.*

Ten – Link Big Reading to All Communication Skills

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 most experts suggest big reading stands as *one essential element* in a good language course or plan for independent learning. Paul 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; and (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, meaning-focused input and output stand at the center. We can use big reading for meaningful input and output. And we can link big, easy reading to all communication skills: listening, writing, fluency, and language focus activities.



A reading BEE is a community of readers who do Big, Easy, and Enjoyable reading.

One great linking activity is the Problem Solver. Paul Nation suggests 3 basic outcomes for Problem Solvers: (a) suggest, (b) choose, and (c) rank. Let's say students read a story about Jim who ate only fast food for one year. Jim gained weight and got sick. In groups, students (a) **suggest** 5 ideas for a healthy diet and exercise plan for Jim; (b) each group, can **choose** their favorite suggestion; and (c) the group can **rank** their ideas from best to worst. When the groups are ready, they can share solutions with the class.

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

In sum, maybe the word BEE gives us the simplest summary of big, easy 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 or her. Readers commune with characters. When I read Harry Potter, I meet with Harry and his 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 can equal one year of living 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 fun; *big reading simulates play*. Enjoyment includes freedom of choice, but it also includes getting recommendations from teachers and other learners. If they start something they don't enjoy, they can stop and choose something else. They can enjoy good stories or in reading non-fiction that helps them learn about wealth, wisdom, health, or happiness.

For the original Top 10 Principles of Extensive reading, see Day and Bamford's journal article: [Top Ten Principles for Teaching Extensive Reading](#), or the [Extensive Reading Top 10](#), a short summary produced by the Extensive Reading Foundation. At ReadOasis, we have published "[Extensive Reading – The Clearest Explanation](#)." *We compared our explanation with 10 of the top online articles that explain extensive reading. We used 6 tests to compare this story with others. And our story scored easier, simpler, and clearer on all 6 tests.

The author Joseph Poulshock received his PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He works as a Professor of English Linguistics at Senshu University in the Department of Intercultural Communication. He also did teacher education at Meiji Gakuin University (2012-2022) and he serves as an Editor at ReadOasis.com. In his free time, Joseph likes to read books, walk his dog, and play ukulele.