Reviewed work:


Reviewed by
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Mastering Academic Reading by Lawrence J. Zwier is a unique reading text for upper intermediate to advanced English language learners enrolled in undergraduate or graduate English for academic purposes (EAP) programs. Zwier challenges advanced EAP students with lengthy academic texts and demanding comprehension and expansion exercises. Basing the structure of the book on Grabe and Stoller’s (2002) analysis of first language (L1) and second language (L2) reading, Zwier aims successfully to strengthen students’ academic vocabulary and provide a mix of pre-reading and post-reading exercises to help students meet textual challenges. Each of the book’s four units consists of three tiers of related readings scaffolded for academic difficulty and complexity. Readings in each tier are introduced with thought-provoking discussion questions designed to elicit learners’ background knowledge and experience. The readings are followed by a lengthy section of diverse comprehension and expansion tasks appropriate to the focus of the tier.

Zwier’s selection of lengthy readings for this book is consistent with research findings linking extensive reading to second language acquisition and reading proficiency (see Grabe, 2009, for a review of relevant research). Zwier echoes Grabe and Stoller’s (2002) contention that the word recognition and phrase parsing abilities necessary for reading proficiency require thousands of hours of reading, a benefit that is difficult to incorporate into a typical EAP reading program. Furthermore, students must not only have opportunities to read, but the reading must also be comprehensible (Krashen, 2009; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999) in order to reduce anxiety and enable acquisition.
Zwier meets the challenges of text quantity and comprehensibility in *Mastering Academic Reading*: each of the four units provides 9,000 to 11,000 words of text on a single broad topic, with each successive tier in a unit building on the one before to facilitate comprehension within a framework of narrow reading. Each reading has extensive follow-up activities designed to develop word recognition and higher order skills needed for working with academic texts. The book does not present vocabulary in lists, nor does it teach strategies per se, but rather, models vocabulary comprehension and reading strategies by guiding the reader back into the text to discover and reinforce meaning. This approach complies with Grabe’s (2004) advice to promote the strategic reader rather than teach reading strategies.

Two of the introductory readings were written expressly for the book in order to provide sufficient background information for the reading(s) that follow; the rest are minimally adapted chapters from books and published academic literature on high-interest topics. Readings include a book review and a government pamphlet to provide readers experience with what Zwier refers to as *fringe genres*. The selections in *Mastering Academic Reading* meet the criteria proposed by Fitzsimmons-Doolan, Davis, Stoller, and Crawford (2012) for sustained content in nonfiction reading: (a) presence of text-considerate features such as glosses of keywords, graphics, headings, and subheadings to facilitate text accessibility, (b) interesting content to stimulate motivation and engagement, (c) and cognitive demand at a level to make academic tasks feasible.

The three purposes for reading identified by Zwier—reading to learn; reading to integrate information, write, and critique texts; and reading for basic comprehension—provide the underlying architecture of the readings and post-reading activities for the three tiers in each high-interest unit. Thus, vocabulary and concepts incorporated into a tier-three reading have been introduced or alluded to in tiers one and two. An important strategy for becoming an academic reader is narrow reading (multiple works by a single author or relating to a single topic) to benefit from repetition of concepts and vocabulary (Bryan, 2011; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Pre-reading tasks are thought-provoking discussion questions that stimulate background knowledge, ask for personal experience and opinion, connect with a previous reading, or prompt for predictions. Other pre-reading tasks include an Internet research task, strategies for dealing with technical/scientific symbols in a text, and interpretation of key words that appear at the beginning of an academic article. Readers are encouraged to use key words to make predictions about the reading. These tasks are all compatible with the eight goals for pre-reading outlined by Grabe and Stoller (2011), with sufficient variety from reading to reading to prevent the activities from becoming predictable or over-used.

The post-reading activities and tasks not only aid comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical thinking, but may also be used for classroom assessment: tasks that inform instruction, are interlinked, and involve collaboration among learners (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). The value of the tasks and activities in *Mastering Academic Reading* lies in the promotion of mastery through activities that provide opportunities for the integration of text and background knowledge. Critical thinking is encouraged through tasks that ask students to summarize, synthesize, evaluate, elaborate, apply, and critique (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Research shows that readers/students do not learn by study, but by problem solving (Krashen & Brown, 2007), and purposeful rereading is an opportunity to provide additional fluency practice and vocabulary.
recycling (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Many of the post-reading exercises are based on higher-order thinking skills that require rereading for problem solving.

A minor distraction was the missing authorship on all but four of the readings and a complete omission of source information. Publishing credits are listed in the Acknowledgments section, and most (but not all) authors are listed with the titles at the beginning of each unit, but it would have been helpful to find the name(s) of the author(s) with their text. Furthermore, it is not clear whether Zweir, Weltig, or both, wrote the two original readings. The lack of author and publishing citations for the reading selections is unexpected in a collection of academic readings. Interestingly, reference sections for published articles are included, and Zwier recognizes footnotes and endnotes as part of the academic literature with which students should be familiar, “if only to get good at ignoring them when appropriate” (p xi). The same might be said for appropriate author and publishing citations. In addition, the lack of an exercise answer key may be seen as a problem by some instructors, but it may also be seen as beneficial, as a number of the questions are left open to interpretation, facilitating discussion among students negotiating the best answer.

Despite these design distractions, Lawrence Zwier’s *Mastering Academic Reading* is a unique contribution to preparing upper intermediate to advanced English language learners for university coursework in a U.S. or international context. Completing the demanding readings, activities, and tasks will give EAP students a solid foundation for academic success. In fact, the text is challenging enough that it could also be appropriate in a college preparation class for native English speakers.

**References**


Meredith: Review of the book Mastering Academic Reading


About the Reviewer

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