

# E8 Reading Test Specifications Version 03

Otmar Gassner, Claudia Mewald & Guenther Sigott

## 1. Purpose of the test

The purpose of the reading test is to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in test takers' reading comprehension. This feedback is of interest to the test takers themselves, their parents, teachers and school principals.

## 2. Description of test takers

The test takers are Austrian pupils in General Secondary School [*Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschule, APS*] and Academic Secondary School [*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule, AHS*] towards the end of grade eight (8. Schulstufe). Pupils from all three ability groups in APS will be tested. The majority of test takers will be aged fourteen.

## 3. Test level

The difficulty level of the test is supposed to encompass levels A2 to B1 in the *Common European Framework of Reference*. However, in order to meet the needs of test takers from 3<sup>rd</sup> ability groups and those of test takers from higher ability groups (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> ability groups, academic secondary school), two forms of the test will be developed. These will contain a set of anchor items, which will enable direct comparisons to be made between learner performances based on the two different test forms.

## 4. Test construct

Since the purpose of the test is diagnosis, detailed information on what individual items measure is required. The abilities to be measured are described in terms of the strategies listed in Table 1. The text material which is to be used to construct items is specified in Table 2.

# Reading Strategies

## Expeditious Reading

### 1. Skimming / reading for gist

- 1.1. Identifying text type
- 1.2. Identifying text topic
- 1.3. Identifying text purpose

### 2. Scanning / reading for detail

- 2.1. Finding specific details (e.g. names, figures, dates, any other surface-level information)

## Careful Reading

### 3. Understanding the text

- 3.1. Understanding explicitly stated main idea(s) and / or distinguishing that from supporting details
- 3.2. Locating, identifying, understanding and comparing facts, opinions, definitions (this includes search reading strategies)
- 3.3. Understanding the logical organisation of the text, e.g. understanding relationships among ideas in a text (problem – solution, cause – effect, temporal sequence, etc.)
- 3.4. Understanding cohesive relationships (reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, lexical cohesion)
- 3.5. Making propositional inferences (deducing information that is not explicitly stated from information that is explicitly stated)

### 4. Understanding lexis

- 4.1. Predicting the meaning of (unknown) words from the context

Table 3 : Reading Strategies. Adapted from Urquhart & Weir 1998.

Text forms		Text types	Beispiele aus <i>Bildungsstandards FS Englisch Sept. Version 05</i>
Descriptive	- impressionistic descriptions	travel accounts	Kurze, einfache persönliche Briefe, Tagebucheintragen
	- technical descriptions	reference books	Einfache Sachtexte
Narrative	- short narrative texts	stories, jokes	Kurze, einfache persönliche Briefe, Karten, E-Mails einfache literarische Texte, Tagebuch
	- fact-based narratives	reports, biographical notes, news, historical accounts	Einfache Sachtexte, Biografische Angaben, Texte in (Schüler-) Zeitungen
Expository	- explications	broader accounts of (especially) abstract phenomena, e.g. newspaper articles, educational materials	Einfache Sachtexte (zu vertrauten Themen), Vertraute Alltagstexte (z.B. Prospekte, Broschüren – auch aus dem Internet)
	- outlines - summaries	initial abstract, introductory paragraph ... of phenomena, e.g. in a thesaurus	
	- text interpretations	book review	Klappentexte, Rezension eines Jugendbuchs
	- pragmatic texts		Speisekarten, Fahrpläne Bestellformulare und ähnliche Vordrucke (z.B. Onlineformulare)
Argumentative	- comments	newspaper leader, letter-to-the-editor, column, book/film review	einfache Texte zu vertrauten Themen in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften
Instructive	- personal instructions	signs, instructive advertisements	Schilder, Broschüren
	- practical instructions	recipes, technical instructions	einfache Anleitungen für Apparate und Vorgänge, mit denen man im Alltag zu tun hat
	- statutory instructions	directions, rules, regulations	Wegbeschreibungen, Regeln, Vorschriften (z.B. Sicherheitsvorschriften)
Literary	- fiction	short stories, urban legends, mini-sagas, simplified readers	einfache literarische Texte (z.B. fiktionale Texte,)
	- poetry	songs and poems	Lieder und Gedichte

**Table 4: Reading text material. Based on: The Dialang Partnership, *DIALANG Assessment Specifications for Reading*, 1999, p. 8.**

## 5. Structure of the test

The test consists of 2 sections. Section 1 consists of 10 independent items each of which is based on short text input no longer than 100 words. Section 2 consists of two tasks based on text input between 200 to 300 words long. The total length of text input in Section 2 should not exceed 500 words. The total number of items in Section 2 is 10. All items will be weighted equally.

## 6. Time allocation

Total testing time available: 45 minutes

Time for administration at the beginning (handing out test booklets): 5 minutes

Time for administration at the end (collecting test booklets): 5 minutes

Working time: 35 minutes

## 7. Item formats

All items must be machine-scoreable and for answering them ticking the correct option must be sufficient. Responding to items must not require test takers to write individual letters, words or longer stretches of language by hand. The format for all items is four-option multiple choice with only one option correct.

## 8. Rubrics

All rubrics are in English. However, they must be formulated in language that is easily understandable for all test takers. Test takers must not be put at a disadvantage because they have difficulty understanding the rubrics.

### Rubric used for part 1 (short one-item tasks)

#### **Part 1**

*Read Texts 01 – 10 and answer the questions below each text. You must give your answers on the ANSWER SHEET. Put a tick ✓ in the correct place on the ANSWER SHEET.*

### Rubric used for part 2 (long multiple-item tasks)

#### **Part 2**

*Read the text and answer the questions below. You must give your answers on the ANSWER SHEET. Put a tick ✓ in the correct place on the ANSWER SHEET.*

## 9. Item exemplars

The item prototypes listed below were written in the first phase of the project by different item writers in 2005 and 2006 and comply with the reading test specifications designed for the Austrian E8 Standards Project. Additional examples from international sources have been added to illustrate the range of item types. They have been taken from the Dialang project as described in the Council of Europe CD *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Reading and Listening Items and Tasks: Pilot Samples (2005)*. The page numbers for the items taken from Dialang refer to the *Dialang English Reading Comprehension Items* on that CD.

As long multiple-item tasks must test at least three different strategies, a linear discussion of strategies is difficult. Therefore, we have chosen to discuss the strategies as they are listed in the test specifications on the basis of short items with a reference to the long tasks where appropriate. Two such texts will be given at the end of the examples (pp. 28-35). The first text is about as long as the two long texts in the test will be, but it is well suited to illustrate five different strategies. The second long text will be used to illustrate strategies 3.3 and 3.4, which deal with the logical organisation of texts and with cohesive relationships.

## Item Exemplars

### Item Exemplars for Expeditious Reading

#### 1. *Skimming/ reading for gist*

##### Strategy 1.1. Identifying text type

###### 1.1.1. Example 1

## SRI LANKA - WELCOME IN PARADISE

### ANTAHARI BEACH RESORT

Opened in 2005, a five star luxury beachfront resort, private swimming pools, palm gardens

Full body therapies, Ayurvedic healing available

65 twin-bed suites all with terrace or balcony

Only 1 hour from Colombo Airport

Six nights in double from € 750.00



#### Tick the correct answer. This text is from

- A a guidebook on Sri Lanka.
- B a holiday letter from Sri Lanka.
- C a travel agent's catalogue.
- D a geography school textbook.

Solution: C

### 1.1.2. Example 2

The shepherd Jorindel noticed with fear that he and his girl friend had sat down close under the walls of the old castle in the dark wood. The girl was singing while she was watching the sun setting fast. Suddenly there was no more singing. When Jorindel turned round, he saw his pretty fiancée had been turned into a nightingale. Jorindel himself could not move from the spot. He stood fixed as a rock.

**Where is the passage taken from?**

- A An adventure story
- B A fairy tale
- C A newspaper article
- D A crime story

Solution: B

### 1.1.3. Example 3

I am 70 and consider myself active around the house and garden. I'm up and down the stairs all day long, walk to and from the shops and visit friends. Do I really need to do exercise on top of all that? My daughter says I do. What's your professional opinion?

**Where is the text taken from?**

- A An advertisement for a sports centre.
- B An article about keeping fit.
- C A letter to an advice column.
- D A report about exercise for old people

Dialang, p. 7, Where is the text taken from?

Solution: C

## Strategy 1.2. Identifying text topic

1.2.1. Example 1. See long task 1, p. 16

1.2.2. Example 2, See long task 2, p. 21

### 1.2.3. Example 3

In South Africa, spring begins in late August and early September. This is a country whose wild flowers are too beautiful to describe. Travelling from near the border with Namibia down towards Cape Town, we make frequent overnight stops, thus keeping journey times short and maximising the time available for wildflower searches and walks. When combined with brilliant sunshine, magnificent scenery and flowers in great numbers and variety, this is a dream tour in a world of flowers.

**What is the best title for this text?**

- A South Africa's attractive climate
- B Botanical holiday in South Africa
- C South Africa safari
- D Trekking in South Africa

Dialang, p. 1, Best Title, South Africa

Solution: B

## Strategy 1.3. Identifying text purpose

1.3.1. Example 1. See long task 1, p. 17

## 2. *Scanning / reading for detail*

**Strategy 2.1. Finding specific details (e.g. names, figures, dates, any other surface-level information)**

2.1.1. Example 1. See long task 1, p. 17

2.1.2. Example 2. See long task 1, p. 17



### 2.1.3. Example 3

#### **Bike Doc**

A Worker's Co-op

Mountain bikes, bikes, tourers, city bikes, racers, hybrids, folders, tandems, and more.

Spares, accessories, clothing, friendly helpful service, everything you should get from the best all round bike shop in Manchester.

Access, Visa, Switch, 0% Finance, Xmas Club.

Hotline: 0161 224 1303

**What can you NOT buy at Bike Doc?**

- A Bicycles
- B Medicines
- C Clothes
- D Spare parts

Dialang p. 11, Bike Doc, mc

**Solution: B**

## Item Exemplars for Careful Reading

### 3. *Understanding the text*

**Strategy 3.1. Understanding explicitly stated main idea(s) and/ or distinguishing that from supporting details**

#### 3.1.1. Example 1

##### ***DOES YOUR MOBILE GIVE YOU A HEADACHE?***

Experts say that radiation from your mobile phone can heat up your brain, causing headaches, sleeping problems and maybe brain damage. Children and teenagers are at more risk than adults because their skulls are still growing and are thinner.

Should you stop using your mobile phone? Of course not. On the other hand, you should not use it too much. If you have just said goodbye to your friends you don't have to call them two minutes later!

Experts say it is a good idea to turn off your mobile at night and to keep it away from you when it is charging.

##### **The writer of the text thinks you should**

- A use your mobile phone less often.
- B use your mobile phone more often.
- C stop using your mobile phone.
- D only use your mobile phone at night.

Solution: A

**Strategy 3.2. Locating, identifying, understanding and comparing facts, opinions, definitions (this includes search reading strategies)**

#### 3.2.1. Example 1. See long task 1, p. 18

**Strategy 3.3. Understanding the logical organisation of the text, e.g. understanding relationships among ideas in a text (problem – solution, cause – effect, temporal sequence, etc.)**

**3.3.1. Example 1**

**Read this short passage from an article and find the correct first sentence.**

.....

Englishmen started settling on the east coast at the end of the 16th century. They experienced many hardships and many of them were not ready for what was awaiting them. In the beginning the Native Americans even helped them, but this friendship did not last for long.

Solution: A

**3.3.2. Example 2. See long task 2, p. 20**

**3.3.3. Example 3. See long task 2, p. 20**

**Strategy 3.4. Understanding cohesive relationships (reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, lexical cohesion)**

**3.4.1. Example 1. See long task 2, p. 20**

**3.4.2. Example 2. See long task 2, p. 20**

### Strategy 3.5. Making propositional inferences (deducing information that is not explicitly stated from information that is explicitly stated)

#### 3.5.1. Example 1

**Read the joke and answer the question.**

A woman is talking to her neighbour about her dog.

Woman: My dog is so clever. Did you know, every morning I tell him what I want from the shop and he gets it for me. In the shop, he barks once for milk, twice for eggs, and three times for bread.

Neighbour: Oh I know.

Woman: How?

Neighbour: My dog told me.

**The neighbour's dog can**

- A read
- B go shopping
- C talk
- D understand instructions

Solution: C

#### 3.5.2. Example 2

**Longer school hours by 2010**

British children could soon be spending longer at school. The government has plans to keep schools open from 8 am to 6 pm by 2010. Schools would offer activities for pupils whose parents want them to stay before and after lessons. Parents would also be able to send their children to school to take part in activities during the holidays. The service would not be free, but would not cost too much.

- A All pupils would have to stay at school until 6 pm.
- B Schools would be open during the holidays.
- C The longer hours would be expensive for parents.
- D Schools would offer new activities for pupils and their parents.

Solution: B

### 3.5.3. Example 3

We are delighted to announce our Autumn Season, in which we will present seven shows prior to the West End, two of which are not only Yvonne Arnaud productions but also world premieres of new plays.

**What kind of organisation would make this announcement?**

- A Sports
- B Theatre
- C School
- D University

Dialang p. 3, Ad for which organisation?

**Solution: B**

### 3.5.4. Example 4

**Label**

Not to be used for babies under six months.

**What does this label mean?**

- A Only give to children over six months old.
- B Throw away after six months' use.
- C No more than six children at any time.
- D New born babies travel free.

Dialang p.13, Label

**Solution: A**

## **4. *Understanding lexis***

**Strategy 4.1. Predicting the meaning of (unknown) words from the context**

**4.1.1. Example 1. See long task 1, p. 18**

## **Long Tasks**

This section contains two long input texts with five four-option multiple choice items each. In the test they are called Part 2 and Part 3.

### **Long Task 1**

**Read the text and answer the questions below. You must give your answers on the ANSWER SHEET. Put a tick ✓ in the correct place on the ANSWER SHEET.**

Chocolate is a favourite for both kids and grown-ups. Chocolate bars, chocolate fudge, chocolate cake, chocolate muffins, chocolate ice cream, chocolate milk, chocolate cereal, hot chocolate, chocolate sauce, ...

There is something special about this substance – so special that the average person in the United States eats 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of chocolate every year!

Have you ever asked yourself where chocolate comes from? In this article, we'll enter the amazing world of chocolate so you can understand exactly what you're eating!

Chocolate starts with a tree called the cocoa tree. This tree grows in regions close to the equator, especially in places such as South America, Africa and Indonesia. The cocoa tree produces a fruit which is about as big as a small pineapple. Inside the fruit are the tree's seeds, also known as cocoa beans. The beans are dried in the sun and then shipped to the chocolate maker. The chocolate maker starts by roasting the beans to bring out their taste. Different beans from different places have different qualities and taste different. Next, the shell of the cocoa bean is taken off.

After this, a honey-like substance called chocolate liquor (the word liquor has nothing to do with alcohol) is produced by grinding the cocoa beans in a mill. All seeds contain some fat, and cocoa beans are no different. Chocolate liquor is pure, unsweetened chocolate. It doesn't taste good in this state – it is bitter.

You can do different things with chocolate liquor. You can give it all sorts of shapes by pouring it out, letting it cool off and become hard. This is unsweetened chocolate. Or you can put it into a press to squeeze out the fat. Then you get cocoa butter and a solid dry substance from which you can make cocoa powder. You can buy both unsweetened chocolate (baking chocolate) and pure cocoa powder at the supermarket. What you are buying is cocoa bean powder, either with or without the cocoa butter.

So far, we have taken the seeds of a tree, roasted them and made powder out of them. Now the process of making the chocolate can begin.

There are three basic things that must be done by the chocolate maker to make a chocolate bar:

Adding sugar, other tastes (like vanilla) and often milk (in milk chocolate). The chocolate maker adds these according to his or her secret recipe.

Conching – A special machine is used to massage the chocolate in order to mix everything in it and to make it smooth. This can take two to six days.

Tempering – This is a process in which the chocolate is slowly heated, then slowly cooled. Without tempering, the chocolate does not harden properly or the cocoa butter separates out (as cream does from milk).

These three steps, along with the type of cocoa beans and the way they are roasted, are the art of chocolate making. These steps are often secrets, and the quality and taste of the chocolate depend on them.

## **Strategy 1.2. Identifying text topic**

### **1.2.1. Example 1**

**What is the best title for the text?**

- A Cocoa
- B The chocolate makers
- C What are cocoa beans?
- D Making chocolate

**Solution: D**



## Strategy 1.3. Identifying text purpose

### 1.3.1. Example 1

**What does the text do?**

- A It tells you about the different kinds of chocolate.
- B It tries to sell more chocolate.
- C It gives information on how chocolate is produced.
- D It helps you to make chocolate.

Solution: C

**Strategy 2.1. Finding specific details (e.g. names, figures, dates, any other surface-level information)**

### 2.1.1. Example 1

**Where do cocoa trees NOT grow?**

- A Indonesia
- B United States
- C South America
- D Africa

Solution: B

### 2.1.2. Example 2

**How long does 'conching' normally take?**

- A 2 – 6 minutes
- B one day
- C twenty minutes
- D 2 – 6 days

Solution: D

**Strategy 3.2. Locating, identifying, understanding and comparing facts, opinions, definitions (this includes search reading strategies)**

**3.2.1. Example 1**

**Which size are the fruits of the cacao tree?**

- A like coffee beans
- B like small pineapples
- C like strawberries

Solution: B

**Strategy 4.1. Predicting the meaning of (unknown) words from the context**

**4.1.1. Example 1**

**What does 'grinding' mean?**

- A cutting into slices
- B melting
- C breaking into very small pieces
- D freezing

Solution: C

## Long Task 2

**Read the text and answer the questions below. You must give your answers on the ANSWER SHEET. Put a tick ✓ in the correct place on the ANSWER SHEET.**

- A** Dr. James Naismith, who worked at the “School for Christian Workers” in Springfield, was asked to create a new sport to keep young men active indoors. The extremely cold winters made it impossible for them to practise their usual sports like soccer or hockey outside. Just doing gymnastics was boring for the young men, and their aggressions were becoming a problem.
- B** However, James Naismith himself never took any money from the sport he had helped to develop. He might be shocked to know that today top players in the NBA earn more than 20 million dollars a year with their sport. Even high schools and universities pay a lot of money for the services of talented students. Today basketball has become a multi-million dollar entertainment industry, not just in the USA but all over the world!
- C** So Naismith wanted a safe game, a game without much physical contact between players. He also wanted a ball game where players needed skill and where they had to cooperate as a team. Remembering a ball game he had played as a boy he designed a game he called “basket ball” and for which he wrote down thirteen rules. His students enjoyed the new game, and its popularity spread quickly.
- D** Today basketball is played by more than 300 million people worldwide. In fact, basketball has become one of the most popular ball sports of today. But how did this sport start off? Who invented its rules? Few people know that it all started in a gym in Springfield, Massachusetts, on December 12th, 1891.
- E** Wilt Chamberlain is often said to be the greatest basketball player ever. He was named “most valuable player” for four seasons and scored an all-time high of 100 points in a historic match against the New York Knicks. After winning two NBA championships he entered a successful career as film star.

**Strategy 3.3. Understanding the logical organisation of the text, e.g. understanding relationships among ideas in a text (problem – solution, cause – effect, temporal sequence, etc.)**

3.3.2. Example 2

3.3.3. Example 3

**Strategy 3.4. Understanding cohesive relationships (reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, lexical cohesion)**

3.4.1. Example 1

3.4.2. Example 2

1. Study the five paragraphs. What is their correct order? Tick the correct number in the table. Careful – one paragraph does NOT belong to the text!

Paragraph									
<b>A</b>	1			2		3		4	
<b>B</b>	1			2		3		4	
<b>C</b>	1			2		3		4	
<b>D</b>	1			2		3		4	
<b>E</b>	1			2		3		4	

Solution

Paragraph									
<b>A</b>	1			2	X	3		4	
<b>B</b>	1			2		3		4	X
<b>C</b>	1			2		3	X	4	
<b>D</b>	1	X		2		3		4	
<b>E</b>	1			2		3		4	

## Strategy 1.2. Identifying text topic

### 1.2.2. Example 2

**What is the best title for the text?**

- A The Life of Dr. James Naismith
- B The History of Basketball
- C The Rules of Basketball
- D Basketball as Big Business

Solution: A

## Sample Answer Sheet

### PART 1

Put a tick ✓ in order to say which answer is correct.

	A	B	C	D
Text 01				
Text 02				
Text 03				
Text 04				
Text 05				
Text 06				
Text 07				
Text 08				
Text 09				
Text 10				

### PART 2

I.

Study the five paragraphs. What is their correct order? Tick the correct number in the table. Careful – one paragraph does NOT belong to the text!

Paragraph										
<b>A</b>	11			12			13			14
<b>B</b>	11			12			13			14
<b>C</b>	11			12			13			14
<b>D</b>	11			12			13			14
<b>E</b>	11			12			13			14

II.

What is the best title for this story? Tick ✓ the correct answer.

15	A	B	C	D

### PART 3

Tick ✓ the correct answers.

	A	B	C	D
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

## Literature

- Alderson, J. 2000. *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alderson, J. & Cseresznyés, M. *Into Europe. Prepare for Modern English Exams. Reading and Use of English*. Budapest: Teleki László Foundation.
- Barr, R., Kamil, M., Mosenthal, P. & Pearson, P. (eds.) 1991. *Handbook of Reading Research*, Vol. 2. New York: Longman.
- Baker, L. & Brown, A. 1984. Cognitive Monitoring in Reading. In: *Flood, J. (ed.)*, 21-44.
- Council of Europe (Ed.). 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: University Press.
- DIALANG. Council of Europe CD (2005). *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Reading and Listening Items and Tasks: Pilot Samples*.
- DIALANG Partnership. 1999. *DIALANG Assessment Specifications for Reading*. In: DIALANG. Council of Europe CD (2005).
- Duffy, G., Roehler, L., Sivan, E., Rackcliffe, G., Book, C., Meloth, M., Vavrus, L., Wesselman, R., Putnam, J. & Bassiri, D. 1987. Effects of Explaining the Reasoning Associating with Using Reading Strategies. In: *Reading Research Quarterly XXII* (3), 347-368.
- Flood, J. (ed.) 1984. *Understanding Reading Comprehension: Cognition, Language and the Structure of Prose*. Newark: Del. International Reading Association..
- Gassner, O. Horak, A., Mewald, C., Moser, W., Schober, M., Stefan, F. & Valsky, C. 2005. *Bildungsstandards in Österreich. Fremdsprachen. Englisch 8. Schulstufe. Version September '05*. Ed. by bm:bwk. Wien: Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur.
- Hoffman, J.V 1991. Teacher and School Effects in Learning to Read. In: *Barr, R. et al. (eds.)*, 911-50.
- Johnston, P. & Allington, R. 1991. Remediation. In: *Barr, R. et al. (eds.)*, 984-1012.
- Sigott, G., Gassner, O., Mewald, C. & Siller, K. 2007. *E8-Standardstests. Entwicklung der Tests für die rezeptiven Fertigkeiten: Überblick. LTC Technical Report 1*. Language Testing Centre, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt.
- Urquhart, A. & Weir, C. 1998. *Reading in a Second Language: Process, Product and Practice*. London: Longman.
- Williams, M. & Burden, R. 1997. *Psychology for Language Teachers: a Social Constructivist Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, E. & Moran, C. 1989. Reading in a Foreign Language at Intermediate and Advanced Levels with Particular Reference to English. In: *Language Teaching*, 22, 217-28.