

LANG
SKILLS



Deafinitely English:

Online materials for teachers of English
as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and
hard of hearing students

Unit 3

**Teachers' Guide to the Booklets
for Students**



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1.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TEACHERS' GUIDE

This Teachers' Guide sets the scene for these accompanying booklets:

- **Strategies for Reading**
- **Strategies for Essay Writing**
- **Developing Study Skills**

Together, these comprise a set of online materials for teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing (D/d/hh) students.

1.1.1. Adapting EFL materials for learning and teaching

There is a shortage of resources appropriate to the teaching of EFL to Deaf sign language users and to deaf or hard of hearing students at the B1–C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The few available 'English for the deaf' texts that focus on adult education are somewhat limited in content, being primarily aimed at a basic literacy level. The world's first and only university for deaf students, Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., does have some excellent resources that are available online (<https://www.gallaudet.edu/>). The British Council website also provides many resources (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/teach-english>), although those are dedicated mostly to teaching English to hearing learners. These general online resources do not make any particular reference to the cultural differences between deaf and hearing learners¹ and may not always meet the needs of D/d/hh learners. The LangSkills booklets have therefore been developed to provide D/d/hh learners of English, at independent user level, with accessible, relevant study materials that respond to their educational needs and interests.

Most of the resources used in the online EFL teaching booklets that accompany this teachers' guide and the booklets on reading and writing have been custom-made due to the difficulty in finding truly appropriate, already-existing materials. This is a time-consuming approach, but once the original materials have been produced, they can be reused, with amendments and adjustments according to the particular student group. Throughout the duration of this project, the EFL resources have been designed, amended, adjusted and redrafted several times. This continuous development

1/ For further details, see, for example: Bauman, D. H-L. (Ed.) (2008). *Open your eyes: Deaf studies talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Ladd, P. (2003) *Understanding Deaf Culture: In search of Deafhood*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

approach is recommended, as it is not possible to be prescriptive and to take for granted that any one set of resources will be useful to or appropriate for all EFL students.

1.1.2. Users of the booklets

The booklets are designed particularly for D/d/hh university students who are planning to study abroad.

- **The booklets focus mainly on the independent user levels, i.e., the B1 and B2 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the proficient C1 level.**
- **The handouts in the booklets are written predominantly at the B1 level of CEFR, as most university students wishing to study abroad should be capable of reading instructions at this level.**

The booklets should, however, be of benefit to most D/d/hh learners at these proficiency levels, regardless of their engagement in a mobility programme or not, who wish to develop their skills in reading, studying and writing.

The learners can use the materials on their own or in class with their teacher.

1.1.3. Structure of the booklets

All the booklets contain

- **an INTRODUCTION** explaining what learners are going to be taught in the booklet and how it can benefit them;
- **WORKSHEETS** with short, informative texts that will help students understand the topics, using lots of practical examples;
- **ACTIVITIES** for the learners to practise what was explained in the worksheets;
- **some of the activities are supplemented by HANDOUTS.**

1.1.4. Activities

Practical Activities follow the input provided in the worksheets. In all the Activities, there are useful tips and hints. Frequently there is a section of further work leading to optional, independent study.

The character of the Activities gives learners the opportunity to work at their own level on various integrated tasks - integrated in that they require the learners to use reading and writing skills simultaneously. The more advanced learners will be able to expand more on their answers using more complex sentence structures and vocabulary, while the less advanced ones will still be able to do the Activities with the command of English they have, with their answers reflecting their level of English.

Most of the Activities require minimal to no resources, apart from those provided in the instructions or handouts. Typically, students will just need a blank sheet of paper, a dictionary (printed or online), a pen, and possibly a set of highlighters.

1.1.5. Goal of the booklets

The Strategies for Reading, Strategies for Essay Writing and Developing Study Skills booklets containing lesson topics, activities and handouts are designed to complement and supplement (online) class and individual teaching; there are also practice exercises for independent study. This serves two purposes: it helps to underpin and consolidate learning experiences, and encourages students to continue the work individually, at their own pace, and without direct teacher supervision. This last issue is paramount, as many D/d/hh students have, in the course of their past educational experience, become very dependent upon teachers, support workers and directed learning (see the results of Output 1, e.g. Sedláčková & Kontra, 2019; Csizér & Kontra, 2020). Alongside introducing learners to autonomous ways of learning, teachers should also pay attention to developing learners' study skills, as the undertaken research suggests. One of the main aims of the online booklets is, therefore, to develop the students' autonomy as learners, and it is hoped that these resources, and the methods with which they are used, help to fulfil that aim.

1.1.6. Format of the booklets

All the booklets are visually appealing and written in plain – though not basic – English. They contain visual symbols and icons to make the text accessible, attractive

to D/d/hh learners, and to remind them of instructions. For example, the booklets contain the symbols described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Symbols Used and Definitions:

	This is used to designate 'read this first' or 'information only' - in other words, 'don't write anything yet'. It also means 'this is important - read it!'.
	This is used to mark an 'Activity' or 'exercise': in other words, 'you should write something now'. This is because many students have the habit of skipping over the 'blurb' in order to get to the 'real' work - a habit that causes many of them to miss the point, or try to do work without adequate preparatory reading.
	Lesson Topic

The booklets' content is designed in and of itself to train the students to look for and identify relevant items. The visual format of the materials enables them to do this with more ease.

In several places, the booklets remind the students not to start completing the activities unless they have read the explanation first. This encourages them to go through the materials before they attempt to answer the questions in the Activities. While this may seem obvious, many D/d/hh students do tend to leap headlong into the questions in their panic to do the work quickly.

1.2. GUIDE TO THE STRATEGIES FOR READING BOOKLET

The Strategies for Reading Booklet is designed to help develop D/d/hh learners' strategic reading skills seen as crucial for both D/d/hh and hearing individuals in becoming successful readers (Silvestri, 2016).

This booklet responds to the fact that low levels of reading comprehension are among the major barriers to academic and career achievement for deaf learners (Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002). Some D/d/hh students are, understandably, initially rather puzzled by the notion that they cannot read effectively; some at this level can read well, but many have a tendency to approach reading mechanically: i.e., some may read the words (often with vocalisation or mouthing) but fail to grasp the full meaning of the text and all its minor details. This notion may be discussed before the students are presented with the first topic of the Reading Booklet covering skills and strategies for effective reading. Similar to many other adult learners with undeveloped literacy skills, many D/d/hh students have not acquired the reading strategies that come naturally to skilled readers who are first-language users of spoken languages, and they may try to read high-level texts in a laborious, word-by-word manner. This is fairly demotivating for the D/d/hh readers and discourages them from reading in English beyond what they are required to read for school. This trait then closely relates to the fact D/d/hh readers may also have limited skills in selecting appropriate texts and panic-buy unsuitable, expensive books that they then find too difficult to use. The struggling D/d/hh learners then tend to read less, starting a vicious circle, which makes reading in foreign languages more difficult and less appealing to them (Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002).

Differences in cognitive abilities among D/d/hh learners indicate that many students may be applying visual reading strategies that should be accounted for. For this reason, attention is paid in this booklet to organizing reading in a visually structured way, encouraging text marking and colour coding.

1.2.1. Topics

The [Strategies for Reading Booklet](#) covers the following topics:

- **Useful strategies and techniques for reading**
- **Making predictions**
- **Skimming**
- **Scanning**
- **Tackling unknown words**

There are four reading HANDOUTS (A, B, C, D) that complement some of the Activities. The handouts are based on two Deaf-related texts: one interview with one of the producers of an American docuseries on Netflix about a group of Deaf and hard of hearing college students who attend Gallaudet University; and one blog post written by a hard of hearing blogger about film subtitling issues.

Introduction to reading skills and strategies

After a short introduction to the booklet for learners, the material begins with a humorous magazine-style quiz about the student's own current reading styles and strategies. The aim is to motivate them to reflect on their reading behaviour and on the possibilities for how to approach reading texts. The subsequent pages describe common reading strategies readers are typically recommended to master.

Making predictions

This section aims to develop learners' prediction-making skills through which readers use information from a text and their own personal knowledge about the topic, as well as their experiences and expectations, to anticipate what the text is about or what happens next, for example. Learners are therefore encouraged to engage with the text and interact with it more actively. This may also increase the chances of their wanting to continue reading, because they may be naturally curious to see if their predictions were right.

Skimming

As shown by research, skilled readers read selectively, not wasting their time with irrelevant passages unless they are reading for pleasure, and are used to skimming through a text to confirm whether it matches their reading goals (Banner & Wang, 2020). This section therefore offers tips on building skimming skills that can help learners select appropriate study texts and relevant sources for the assigned tasks.

Scanning

It can be commonly observed in EFL classes - for example, when doing some of the typical Cambridge exams' reading comprehension tasks - that many D/d/hh learners do not always look for the answers in the text itself, but rather seek them outside of the text. Sedláčková, who conducted research into the EFL reading of deaf university students, observed this as well (2016: 121). The scan-reading techniques, and the related text-marking and colour-coding techniques presented in this section, therefore, aim to increase readers' interaction with the text itself.

Tackling unknown words

This section focuses on some of the possibilities learners have when encountering unfamiliar words in a text. As a limited vocabulary is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in reading achievement (Sidek & Rahim, 2015), learners need to be equipped with suitable strategies that can help them avoid diving into plenty of unfamiliar words, which often exhausts their energy for further engaging with the text. Several such strategies are shown and can be practised in the subsequent Activities.

1.2.2. Goals

In this booklet the learners will:

- **get to know some of the main reading strategies: prediction making, skimming, scanning, and possibilities for tackling unknown words;**
- **learn how making predictions can help improve reading comprehension;**
- **understand the role of skimming and scanning, and learn how to apply these strategies;**
- **learn how to tackle unknown words;**
- **practise these strategies in a series of Activities, the contents of which are culturally relevant to Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners.**

1.3. GUIDE TO THE STRATEGIES FOR ESSAY WRITING BOOKLET

The Strategies for Essay Writing Booklet was designed with the scarcity of materials dedicated to developing D/d/hh learners' writing skills with culturally relevant materials in mind.

Academic writing is an integral part of higher education. It is a very complex area that requires knowledge of the field as well as the skills and abilities to express one's ideas through the written word, including knowledge of grammatical and syntactical structures, proper choice of vocabulary, effective planning, clear and logical organization of one's writing, and revising the final product.

Though academic writing is challenging for most students regardless of their hearing status, many D/d/hh learners find themselves particularly struggling with it, and not primarily because they lack knowledge of the field. The literature in general indicates that D/d/hh students struggle with writing (e.g. Andrews, Shaw and Lomas, 2011; Nelson & Bruce, 2020; Marschark, Lang & Albertini, 2002) and display delays in writing in comparison with their hearing classmates (Paul, 2001).

Some common traits displayed by the writing of Deaf learners are a rigid writing style, use of shorter sentences, a limited range of vocabulary, issues with syntactical structures, or difficulty using the passive voice (Nelson & Bruce, 2020: 102).

Competent organization of one's writing is another source of possible difficulties, even in those who possess more advanced knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Antia, Reed and Kreimeyer observe that D/d/hh writers tend to resort to redundancies and use few cohesive tools to tie the text together (2020), which also negatively impacts the perceived consistency of the produced text.

Another relevant observation made by Antia, Reed & Kreimeyer is that since many D/d/hh students also experience difficulty reading, they may not have enough access to models of good writing, thus lacking relevant models to follow (2020: 245).

The booklet therefore encourages learners to think about how they can improve their essay writing in English, which is directly in line with the need for efficient organization of D/d/hh learners' writing, as suggested above.

1.3.1. Topics

The [Strategies for Essay Writing Booklet](#) contains the following topics:

- **Introduction to effective essay writing**
- **Essay preparation**
- **Improving essay structure**
- **Writing your essay**
- **Editing your essay: Avoiding common mistakes**

Introduction to effective essay writing

Learners get acquainted with different types of essays and the importance of reading essay instructions carefully, which is something they sometimes underestimate, skipping directly to the writing without reflecting on what they are being asked to do. In the Activities, they get to think about suitable essay topics and learn some useful verbs that typically appear in essay instructions so they better understand what to do, as well as expanding their academic writing vocabulary.

Essay preparation

This section leads learners to approach essay writing strategically, without wasting their energies producing parts they might eventually not need. The importance of planning in the first place is stressed. Learners can choose from a variety of visual outlining methods, such as using concept maps, diagrams or charts.

Improving essay structure

Learners are invited to reflect on what makes an effective essay structure. The metaphor of a fish is used to visually explain the crucial elements of an essay: the introduction, the main body, and the conclusion. An alternative way of visualizing this is the hamburger diagram. The top and bottom hamburger buns represent the essay's introduction and the conclusion, while the filling represents the body. This approach of teaching through analogy hopes to motivate D/d/hh students to engage visually with this section.

Writing your essay

This is a very brief section where learners are finally encouraged to actually start writing after the previous preparatory stages.

Editing your essay: Avoiding common mistakes

The booklet includes a section based on common mistakes and how students can learn from considering such errors when writing essays. The learners are shown what the typical mistakes are and are provided with practical tips on reducing their occurrence in their own writing.

1.3.2. Goals

In this booklet the learners will:

- **be provided with a number of useful essay-writing tips;**
- **get to know more about the writing process in order to make it easier and better organize their writing;**
- **learn what the major mistakes are that students make when writing essays, and receive tips on avoiding them;**
- **understand when and how to reference and quote correctly.**

1.4. GUIDE TO THE DEVELOPING STUDY SKILLS BOOKLET

The Developing Study Skills Booklet aims to help learners approach academic tasks and assignments in a strategic manner, as plenty of learners fail to perform on academic tasks due to inappropriate or ineffective study strategies.

All learners already possess study skills; however, having advanced study skills requires developing the skills one has, adapting them, and revising them from time to time, as the needs of every learner develop and change with new challenges and requirements. Study skills such as good time management, assignment planning, using resources, note taking, etc., are transferable. Not only do they help the learner to feel more in control of their studies, but their effective use may also positively impact their future working experience.

It cannot be expected that all learners studying at universities have entered them fully equipped with adequate skills, however. The independent learning required in higher education, let alone independent online learning, imposes quite a new set of demands on the learner. Wingate (2006) advocates for making support in the study skills area widely available to all learners, not just those traditionally deemed vulnerable.

Many universities nowadays publish their own study skills recommendations and tips addressing this very important area. However, there are several factors to consider when using these tips with D/d/hh students. As shown by recent research, including the findings made by the LangSkills team, D/d/hh learners have been found to be rather teacher- dependent, not used to actively searching on their own for resources for their studies in general. Also, these instructional texts may not be particularly suitable for D/d/hh learners because of their structure, or they may not be culturally relevant to them. What's more, Wingate (2006) finds instructional texts are not enough to encourage experiencing and reflecting. She proposes that learners should be provided with enough practical experience dealing with academic tasks, as well as feedback on this experience.

The booklet, therefore, pays attention to the visual layout of the materials. The worksheets are written in plain, though not basic, English. The booklet invites D/d/hh learners to tie the information provided in the worksheets with practical Activities that build on their personal experience and include reflective questions in order to support independent study and autonomous learning.

1.4.1. Topics

The [Strategies for Study Skills Booklet](#) contains the following:

- **Understanding assignment & exam questions**
- **Tips on better time-management skills**
- **Making the most of your study session**

Understanding assignment & exam questions

Learners read a section focussed on writing assignments and answering exam questions in English in order to better understand what is required from an assignment or an examination question. The verbs used in assignment instructions are widely used in Academic English, so learners can expand their vocabulary at the same time.

Tips on better time-management skills

All language learners and university students need to be able to manage their time, but this is an particularly important skill for D/d/hh individuals, who have been found to be 'chronic time wasters' (Ekundayo, 2018). This section, therefore, provides tips on effective planning, prioritising tasks, and the possibilities for breaking down big tasks, using plenty of examples and practical Activities.

Making the most of your study session

This section invites learners to reflect on the study environment and on organizing their study space, as well as identifying and avoiding the major distractors they feel interrupt their study sessions. Importance is also given to finding the right balance between studies and well-being.

1.4.2. Goals

In this booklet, learners will:

- **learn how to better understand the questions in assignments and exams in English;**
- **learn some tips that will help them improve their time-management skills;**
- **be encouraged to reflect on their own study patterns so they can identify areas for improvement;**
- **be provided with tips on handling distractions.**

1.5. CONCLUDING NOTE

The true measure of success for developing English Skills for EU Mobility is not the accuracy of students' written English upon completion of the course; rather, it is the effectiveness of their reading and writing. These materials may not enable you to elevate students' English to the 'perfect' or fully fluent level. Instead, these materials aim to give them an insight into what is required of them whilst traveling and to develop their skills at a higher level. Above all, the materials aim to enhance the teacher's ability to empower deaf learners, as well as the student's confidence and ability to tackle the reading, writing, general literacy and study skills that will be of benefit to them during their EU mobility as well as during life-long learning.

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