



The Smarter & Effective Learning Approach

# IGCSE ENGLISH PROGRAMME

READING MODULE 1

Name:

YEAR 10



Good reading skills are essential for improving fluency in English. These skills will not only help you understand what you are reading— they will also help you understand how and why a text was written. With enough practice, this will help you develop and improve your writing skills as well. In this lesson, you will be introduced to passive and active reading, before moving on to the main focus of learning how to locate information by skimming and scanning.

**REMEMBER**

Active reading improves your reading skills and will therefore help you in all your school subjects.

## Passive and Active Reading

### Passive reading

A process where we register what we are reading, without consciously having to think about the meaning of the words used. For example, we use passive reading when we read road signs.

**TOP TIP**

Passive reading means we see the word or words, but don't really think about what they mean.

**Active reading**

A process involved in understanding more complicated writing, by which we have to engage more closely with what is written and think more carefully about the meaning of the words used by the writers.

**TOP TIP**

Active reading means we really think about what we are reading and try to get as much out of the text as we can. Pay close attention to the details and specifics of what you are reading.

Read the following passage which describes a journey on the luxurious Simplon Orient-Express train.

**Aboard the Orient Express**

Appropriately enough for a train steeped in romance, the principal routes of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express link three of Europe's most beguiling cities, London, Paris and Venice. The chocolate-and-cream British Pullman train departs from London Victoria and glides through Kent on the way to the Channel. In France the royal-blue train with brass insignia, lined by uniformed and white-gloved attendant, is waiting to take you to the capital while a four-course dinner is served. The dinner is made unforgettable by the sumptuous surroundings of the Lalique glass and wood-panelled dining cars as well as the quality of the food.

In Paris, the train uses the same station, Gare de l'Est, from which the first Orient Express departed on October 4, 1883. The sense of dinner-jacketed style is enhanced by the contrast with passengers milling about on the

platforms, the bar car's piano and period tunes a world away from the iPods of today's Parisian commuters.

It is likely to be dark by the time the train weaves through the hills growing the grapes that produce the Champagne served on board.

Passengers slumber through eastern France and northern Switzerland, usually waking somewhere east of Zürich. Raising the blind to reveal the waters of Zürichsee or the majestic peaks lining the northern shore of Walensee is part of the pleasure of overnight train travel—that sense of being somewhere so different from the landscapes and architecture of the previous evening.

The snow-capped peaks of tiny Leichtenstein are a prelude to the Austrian Alps, as a continental breakfast is delivered to your compartment. A pause at the Tyrolean capital of Innsbruck is an opportunity to stretch one's legs before the train reverses to head south through the Brenner Pass, its crags periodically topped by stone fortresses controlling valleys through the Dolomites. Lunch is served as the train drops down from the summit on the border with Italy, conifer-clad slopes giving way to huddled villages surrounded by vineyards and orchards.

The architectural style of the pale stone castle and palaces forming Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento emphasizes the transition from central European to Mediterranean culture. With the Adige River for company, the train makes for Verona, forever associated with the doomed love of Romeo and Juliet.

Afternoon tea is served as the train crosses the fertile landscape of the countryside around Vicenza. The last major city before journey's end is Padua, where Galileo once taught mathematics at the university, founded in 1222. The causeway linking Venice Mestre and the island is the perfect approach to the city and its towers and domes rising above tiled roofs. Then, when the train arrives and you walk out of Santa Lucia terminus, you find yourself on the bank of the Grand Canal.

*Source: Adapted from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/rail-journeys/The-Orient-Express-Great-Train-Journeys/>*

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## Task 1

Now, let's test your active reading skills. Skim and scan for the right answers.

1. Where does the Simplon-Orient-Express start and end?

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2. What are three of the countries it travels through?

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3. What meals are served?

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4. Name three cities the train goes through.

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5. On what date did the first Orient Express depart?

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## Locating Information: Skimming and scanning

Reading efficiently is a very valuable skill, especially when you are working under a time limit. Therefore, it is important to develop **active reading skills**—particularly **skimming** and **scanning**—which will help you save time.

### Skimming and Scanning

#### Skimming

This involves reading the whole text quickly, to gain a clear overall picture and understanding of its content.

It is especially helpful to get clues from headlines and sub-headings. This is also known as ‘getting the gist’ of the text.

#### **TOP TIP**

In simple terms, to ‘skim’ is to go along the surface of something quickly. The same idea is applied to skimming when you read — go through a text quickly, getting the gist – without getting caught up with details.

## Scanning

This involves searching sections of a text once you have read it. Scanning means looking for specific details or information. Mastering the skill of scanning will help you to locate and select appropriate information such as facts, opinions and details related to a specific topic or idea.

### **TOP TIP**

It is helpful to think of scanning as matching two objects that belong to a pair — like shoelaces, earrings or chopsticks — in a messy drawer.

You need to have a strong idea of the one you're holding so you can find its missing pair.

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### Task 3

Skim the extract from the opening chapter of 'The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency' by Alexander McCall Smith, then answer the questions.

Mma Ramotswe had a detective agency in Africa, at the foot of Kgale Hill. These were its assets: a tiny white van, two desks, two chairs, a telephone, and an old typewriter. Then there was a teapot, in which Mma Ramotswe—the only lady private detective in Botswana—brewed redbush tea. And three mugs— one for herself, one for her secretary, and one for the client. What else does a detective agency really need? Detective agencies rely on human intuition and intelligence, both of which Mma Ramotswe had in abundance. No inventory would ever include those, of course.

But there was also the view, which again could appear on no inventory. How could any such list describe what one saw when one looked out from Mma Ramotswe's door? To the front, an acacia tree, the thorn tree which dots the wide edges of the Kalahari; the great white thorns, a warning; the olive-grey leaves, by contrast, so delicate. In its branches, in the late afternoon, or in the cool of the early morning, one might see a Go-Away Bird, or hear it, rather. And beyond the acacia, over the dusty road, the roofs of the town under a cover of trees and scrub bush; on the horizon, in a blue shimmer of heat, like improbable, overgrown termite mounds.

From *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith

## YEAR 10 READING SKILL 1

1. What type of text is this extract taken from?

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2. Where is it set?

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3. Who is the character featured in the passage?

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4. Is this passage full of action?

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5. What is the purpose of this text?

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6. What is an attitude or a message being presented by the text?

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7. Is this passage very descriptive? Explain.

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8. What do you think might happen next or later?

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**Task 4**

Skim the following article excerpt about a national park in Cambodia, then answer the questions.

**Kirirom National Park**

All that remains of the king's palace is the fireplace. Twenty feet tall, it was built in the 1940s by the king and his acolytes. It stands on a flattened mountaintop. The view is of Cambodia's only high-altitude pine forest, in Kirirom national park—two hours' drive southwest of Phnom Penh. The scenery is almost alpine, the skinny pines saluting the sun, the air aromatic and fresh. [During a period of unrest] the palace [was smashed] along with 150 surrounding villas that once made up the king's "Happy Mountain" resort. Some buildings are intact—more deserted than ruined.

Today, Kirirom is popular among locals but often overlooked by foreign visitors. Away from the hot chaos of the capital, there are peaceful treks, mountain biking and dips in waterfalls. A stay at Kirirom Mountain Lodge (doubles from US\$35; from \$60 on weekend), a converted 1940s villa near Oamrei Phong village in the centre of the park, Moroccan chef Bouchaib serves flatbread, honey-dripped and dotted with raisins. Guests can eat while surveying the green expanse of cardamom forests below.

From 'Undiscovered South-East Asia' by Nathan Thomson, *The Guardian*

1. Is this text fiction or non-fiction?

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2. What is the purpose of the text?

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3. Who do you think the writer's intended audience is for the text?

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4. How would you describe the characteristics of the text in terms of the way it is written?

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5. How is the focus of the first paragraph different to that of the second paragraph?

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### Task 5

Now, scan the text to answer the following questions.

1. What nationality is the chef at Kirirom Mountain Lodge?

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2. In which decade was the king's palace built?

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3. How far is the national park from Phnom Penh?

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4. What is the only remaining feature of the king's palace?

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5. What is the starting price for a double room during the weekend at the Kirirom Mountain Lodge?

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#### **TOP TIP**

When you scan a text for answers, think about what the question is asking. Keep a look out for key words, and similar terms that will provide the information you are looking

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## Identifying key words in a question

When reading questions, key words will usually either give clear instructions regarding **what you should do** to answer the question (e.g. *explain, describe*), or regarding **what the focus of your answer should be** (e.g. a character's behaviour, details of a place).

You may find it useful to underline key words when reading a question. For example, look at this summary question based on the passage 'A Whale of a Time in Oz!'.

*Carefully read the passage 'A Whale of a Time in Oz!' and then summarise what it tells us about the behaviour of Southern Right Whales and why they were considered to be so suitable for hunting.*

Here is the question again, with the key words underlined:

*Read carefully the passage 'A Whale of a Time in Oz!' and then summarise what it tells us about the behaviour of Southern Right Whales and why they were considered to be so suitable for hunting.*

From your skimming of the question, you will know that the passage is going to be about Southern Right Whales. The underlined key words— which will guide your scanning process—are the instructions **summarise** (which will tell you how to structure your answer), as well as **behaviour** and **why they are so**

*suitable for hunting* (which tells you what your answer should be about).

## Learning to skim and scan when reading texts.

Now, let's take a look at how to skim and scan when reading 'A Whale of a Time in Oz!'.

### 1: SKIM

When you go through the text briefly, you will notice the following parts of the text:

- Title
- Sub-heading
- Photograph
- Extracted quote

### 2: SCAN

Understand what the question is asking.

Then, identify and choose the details that are relevant to the question.

### 3: SELECT

Scanning allows you to separate relevant details from irrelevant ones.

This question requires you to identify facts about the whales and why they were hunted. Make sure you understand the difference between facts and opinions.

Since the question is asking for factual details, only include factual details in your answer.

#### KEY TERMS

**Facts:** Objective details which can be supported by evidence.

**Opinions:** Subjective views from the writer's perspective which cannot be proven right or wrong.

## A Whale of a Time in Oz!

In search of the Southern Right Whale ‘down under’  
**Helen Highwater**



Getting there wasn't easy. First there was a 500 kilometre flight from Adelaide on a tiny plane shaped like a toothpaste tube. Then once we'd landed we met up with Gary White, our expedition leader and his jeep. 200 kilometres along the Eyre Highway we entered the treeless Nullarbor Plain, a semi-desert populated mainly by Aboriginal people.

Our destination was the head of the Great Australian Bight, where we were to spend two days watching whales. On the way Gary told us what we wanted to know:

‘Sadly, over 25 000 whales had been killed before whaling ceased in 1930. By this time Southern Right Whales were virtually extinct. They were known as “Right” whales because they were right for hunting in small land-based boats. They came closer inshore, floated when killed, and had thick blubber, which produced the valuable whale oil when it was boiled down. This meant that the poor whales were hunted down in vast numbers by money-making shipowners.’

The first few paragraphs set the scene. Although you will be taking the details as useful background information, you will also be aware that the Southern Right Whale does not receive mention until the third paragraph.

If you are reading actively, you will immediately notice this and be alert for further information which is going to follow.

As you read through the third and fourth paragraphs, you may begin to ask yourself questions like ‘What do these details tell us about the whales’ behaviour?’, ‘What was it about their behaviour that made them so easy to hunt?’, and so on.

As you move on through the passage, you will find that it alternates between giving facts about the whales’ behaviour and details about the scenery, and the writer’s personal response to seeing the whales in their element.

The details of the scenery and the writer’s opinions may make the passage interesting, but skim over them, since they are not details specifically connected to the questions which you are focusing on.

‘Right Whales feed on small creatures at or near the surface, gently swimming along with their mouths half open, allowing the sea water to flow in. The water is pushed back out with their tongues, leaving the food behind. Thankfully, they are now a protected species and numbers have risen to nearly 800.’

This was a dismal tale but it had a happy ending—the whales were now safe from murderous whale hunters.

Two hours before sunset we arrived at our destination. The crumbling limestone cliffs dropped sheer into the deep blue of the bay. It was August, the height of the whales’ breeding season. Every three years the whales come from their home waters in the Antarctic to their Australian breeding grounds. Mature females weigh 80 tonnes. The females do not eat at all until they return from the Antarctic. By this time they will have lost 20 tonnes in weight.

As the sun began to set behind us we looked out, but saw... nothing. Then boom! Right in front of us the sea erupted as a huge whale burst from the surface, thrusting its body out of the water and smashing down with a noise like a cannon firing. Again and again it surged form the sea, a majestic and thrilling sight.

After a meal under the stars, we talked some more. Gary told us that large numbers of female whales and their calves had been in the bay the previous week. The calves are six metres long at birth and they grow to three times that length.

*‘This was Nature at its finest, awesome and strangely moving.’*

Our final day began early. We packed up our camp, walked to the cliff edge and were amazed! I counted 24 whales. Swimming parallel to the shore, very close in, was a long procession of mothers and their calves. They floated past on the surface. Some swam side by side, others lazily rolled over each other as they moved slowly along. They were enormous. As they expelled the air from their blow-holes, great spouts of misty waters shot upwards. This was Nature at its finest, awesome and strangely moving. We were silent as watchers of a primeval, wonderful sight. How can people hunt such beautiful and truly amazing creatures?

All too soon we had to go. In October the whales would return home too, home to the Antarctic. We said little. We’d been stunned by the size of Australia, climbed Ayers Rock and followed the tourist trail. These would become distant memories, but our two days whale-watching would remain alive in our hearts forever.

Photo credit: “*Southern Right Whale (Eubalaena australis)*”

## Task 6

- Make numbered notes under the following headings: 'The behaviour of Southern Right Whales' and 'Why Southern Right Whales were suitable for hunting'. As much as you can, use your own words.
- Make a list of points under the heading of 'What the writer felt about her experience of visiting Australia and of watching the whales'.

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## Conclusion

From this lesson and its tasks, we can see that the ability to identify relevant information efficiently is a useful and valuable skill. Skimming, scanning and paying attention to keywords will serve you well in examinations.

The quicker you are able to obtain your answers, the more time you will have to articulate your understanding of them.

Do note that the readings used as texts in examinations may range from nonfictional to fictional materials.

## An additional note on scanning

When scanning for answers, be sure to know what you are looking for, then focus on locating it— be sure to ignore irrelevant information, details or comments, known as **distractors**.

### KEY TERMS

**Distractors:** Information and details in a comprehension passage which, although interesting in themselves, are not relevant to answering any of the questions and should not be included in your answers.





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