Studies have shown that when reading in a foreign language, we immediately abandon our mother tongue reading skills; skimming, scanning and reading for detail.

Instead, most language learners, when reading try to understand every single word and tend to stop reading as soon as they encounter an unknown word to look it up in a dictionary.

This not only makes them lose track of what they’re reading, but also makes them focus on the unknown word instead of the general comprehension of the text, which in many cases may lead to frustration.

By learning how to use context, parts of speech and word order, readers will be able to understand the meaning of unknown words without having to interrupt their reading to check in a dictionary.

This, along with accepting from the very beginning, that when reading a foreign language we will always come across unknown words.

**CONTEXT**

1. Check if the word sounds familiar or similar to a word in your native language. There are often many words that sound alike in different languages.

2. Ask yourself if the word looks to any other word you do know in English. Sometimes you know the word, it’s just being conjugated differently. (EX: Speak, speaking, spoke).
3. Check the **meaning of the words surrounding the unfamiliar word.**
   Meaning, the other words in the sentence.

4. Take the paragraph where the unfamiliar word is and ignoring that word try answering **what is happening, where it’s happening, when it’s happening, and to who is it happening to. Circle, underline or take note of the word. That’s all. Once you do, keep going.**

5. Only circle, underline, or take note of **key words:** verbs, adjectives, nouns, etc. Most **short words** are usually pronouns, prepositions or interjections. These are not indispensable for general comprehension.

6. Use the dictionary to check the meaning only if the word is **constantly being repeated** or is part of a **title or a heading.**

7. Finally and after following the steps above, **make a prediction** of the meaning of the word. Does the sentence **make sense?**

**PARTS OF SPEECH**

1. **Guess what type of word** the unknown word is (revise the list below).

2. If it’s a **short word** and looks like a pronoun, preposition or interjection, ignore it. These are not indispensable for general comprehension.

3. **What does the sentence look like without the unknown word?**

4. **Does the sentence make sense** without this word?

5. **What does the unknown word add to the sentence? (function of the word)**

6. **What type of word is the word before and the word after the unknown word?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of speech</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Example sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verb</strong></td>
<td>Action (lexical verbs) or state (auxiliary verbs)</td>
<td><em>to be, have, do, dance, think, eat.</em></td>
<td>I work in the mornings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Noun</strong></td>
<td>Thing or person.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Bogota, university, chair, bird, Angelica.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>This is my book.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adjective</strong></td>
<td>Describes a noun.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Tall, thin, pretty, ugly.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>My sister is very tall.</em></td>
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<td><strong>Determiner</strong></td>
<td>limits or determines a noun.</td>
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<td><em>A, an, the, some, many, 1, 2, 3.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>This is a present I bought for you.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adverb</strong></td>
<td>Describes a verb, adjective or adverb.</td>
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<td><em>Quickly, silently, badly, very, yet, just.</em></td>
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<td><em>I haven’t had lunch yet.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pronoun</strong></td>
<td>Replaces a noun.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>I, you, he, she, they.</em></td>
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<td><em>Tara is Indian. She is beautiful.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preposition</strong></td>
<td>Describes a place, movement or time.</td>
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<td><em>To, on, in, inside, at.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The movie starts at 8:00pm.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conjunction</strong></td>
<td>Joins clauses, sentences or words.</td>
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<td><em>And, but, while, because, then, so, as.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>I’d rather eat a chocolate ice cream than a vanilla ice cream.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interjection</strong></td>
<td>Short exclamation expressing a feeling.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Oh!, ouch!, hi!</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Ouch! I hurt myself.</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Active voice
**typical word order.**
- Subject (the doer) + verb + new information (which is the focus).
- Focus is on the action and the new information.
- *Marco has written four successful novels.*

### Passive voice
**omitting who the doer is.**
- New information + verb, no doer
- Focus is on the action.
- *Four successful novels were written.*

### Passive voice
**placing the doer in a prepositional phrase after the verb.**
- New information + verb + doer
- Focus is on the doer.
- *Four successful novels were written by Marco.*

### Passive voice
**omitting who the doer is.**
- New information + verb, no doer
- Focus is on the action.
- *Four successful novels were written.*

### Passive voice
**placing the doer in a prepositional phrase after the verb.**
- New information + verb + doer
- Focus is on the doer.
- *Four successful novels were written by Marco.*