Graded Reading

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OPEN Intermediate Workshop

What is Graded Reading?

Graded reading (or extensive reading) involves reading a lot of English texts that have been **graded (or simplified)**, according to their use of **vocabulary** and **grammar**. Language learners are introduced to easy language before they move up to more difficult language.

Books at the lowest level are written with the **easiest**, **most frequent**, and **most useful** words. Then, more complex words and grammar are added at each additional level.

The **goal** is to read enough books at one level to **develop sufficient fluency** to enable the reader to **move to the next level**. In this way, learners progress through the different levels until they are eventually able to read **native level texts fluently**.

Reading in Japanese High Schools

In Japanese high schools, students do **intensive reading** where they **practice grammar** and **learn vocabulary** through reading short texts. There are **many difficult words** that are taught mainly by **translation**.

However, if learners only read this way:

- they **cannot read quickly** because the text is difficult, and many words are unknown.

- they **often have to stop** and use a dictionary to look up new words.

- they have **few chances to build reading speed and fluency**.

- they **cannot learn the patterns in English** because the texts are short.

- they **cannot read at their own level of reading ability** because they don't choose the texts.

Intensive Reading isn't wrong, but it is limited by what it tries to do. In addition to reading this way, learners need to **develop their reading fluency** through Graded Reading (Extensive Reading).

Graded Reading (or Extensive Reading)

Graded reading involves the following:

- the learner reads **large amounts of simple text** so that they can read smoothly and confidently.

- the learner reads **well-within their current reading ability** to build reading speed, confidence and fluency.

- the focus is on **general comprehension** and on **developing reading fluency**, and not learning new language.

- the learner **chooses the book** and reads a wide variety of things that interest them.

- because the learner is reading a lot of text, they **revisit the most important vocabulary and grammar** again and again, which will deepen their knowledge of it.

Why do Graded Reading?

There are many reasons why **Extensive Reading** is good for language development.

- it **builds vocabulary**. When learners read a lot, they meet thousands of words and word patterns, which allows the learner to **develop an awareness of collocations** (common word combinations) and **lexical phrases**.

- it helps learners **understand grammar**. Extensive Reading provides opportunities to see grammar in context so learners can **deepen their understanding of how grammar is really used**.

- it helps learners to **build reading speed and reading fluency**. Developing reading speed is important because it helps learners to understand language faster and better.

- it is vital to **encounter new vocabulary again and again to learn it**. Extensive Reading provides opportunities to do this because the learner meets large amounts of words and grammatical structures repeatedly.

- Extensive Reading involves reading for pleasure. This **builds confidence and motivation** which makes the learner a more effective user of language.

Two ways you can practice Graded Reading

Two ways in which you can practice graded reading in order to develop your English language skills are:

- Reading **graded reader books** in the genre of your choice.

- Reading **graded online news articles** for English language learners.

Graded Readers

Graded Readers are books of **various genres** that are specially created for learners of foreign languages. They may be simplified versions of **popular classics**, **contemporary novels, original fiction, biographies**, or **non-fiction books**. There are many graded readers that are issued by different publishers. Here are some of the most popular publishers of them:

1. **Oxford Graded Readers**

There is an interactive **level test** to determine your reading level. The Bookworms or Dominoes series are designed for adult readers and there are seven levels from Starter to Level 6. They also have an **Oxford Reading Club** that you can join to read digital books. Here is a **link** to their catalogue.

2. **Pearson English Readers**

There are placement tests on their website that you can download. There are seven levels of books from A1-A2 (Easystarts) to B2-C1 (Level 6). Here is a **link** to a PDF guide of their grading system.

3. **Penguin Readers**

There are eight levels of books from pre-A1 (Starter) to B2 (Level 7). Here is a PDF **user guide** to their graded readers and you can search for books **here**.

4. **Macmillan Readers**

There is an interactive level test at their website. Macmillan Readers are graded from Starter to Upper Intermediate (A1-B2). Here is a **link** to the Macmillan catalogue.

Which Level is Right?

The Oxford Grader Reader website provides **Level Tests** for each of their seven levels (Starter to Level 6). These level tests are interactive online tests designed to help you find the best level to start reading at. Here is a link to their **level tests**.

Which Level is Right?

There is also **The 5-Finger Rule** from the Extensive Reading Foundation website, which you can use to judge whether a reading level is a good match for you.

The 5-finger rule

To find a good reading level, choose a book. Open to any page. Read it. On your hand, count the number of new words.

0-1 new words = too easy.

2-3 = This level is perfect!

4 = This is a "challenge" level.
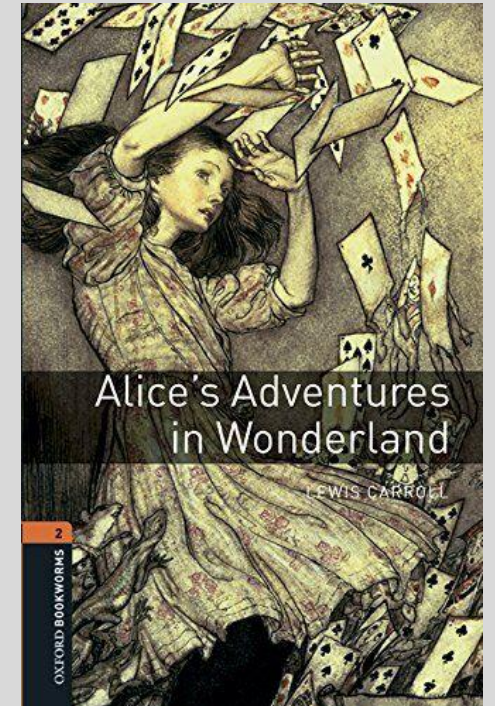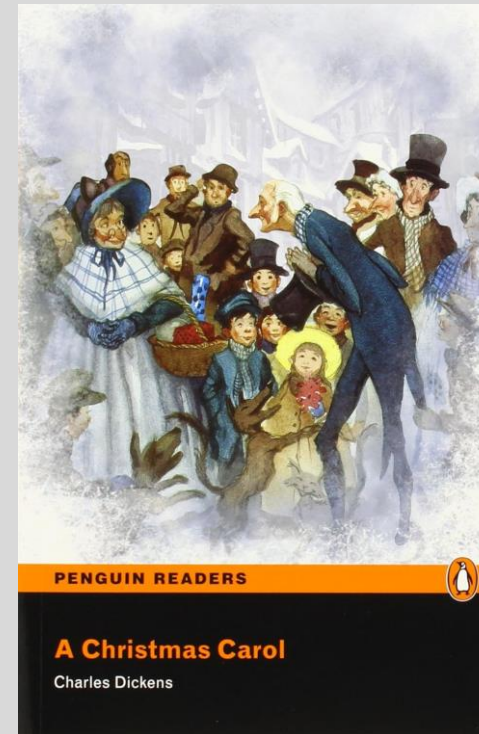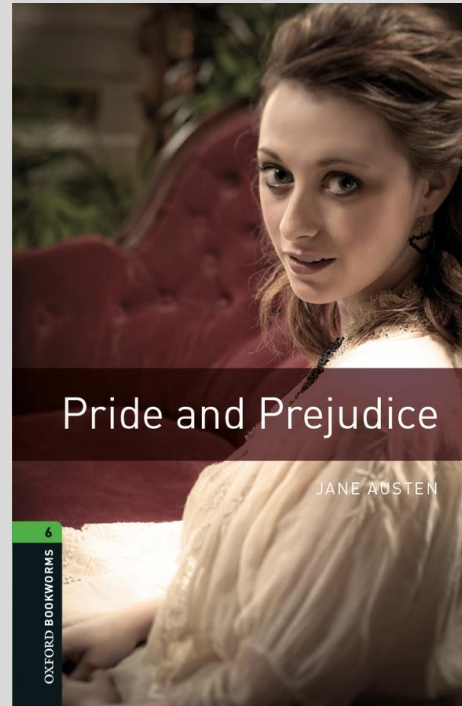It is a little difficult. But you can try it if the book seems really interesting.
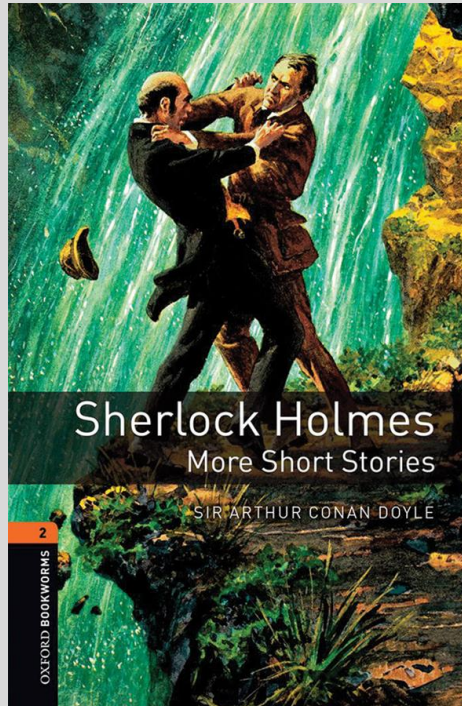
5+ = Too difficult.
If a book is too difficult, you probably won't enjoy it.

www.ERFoundation.org

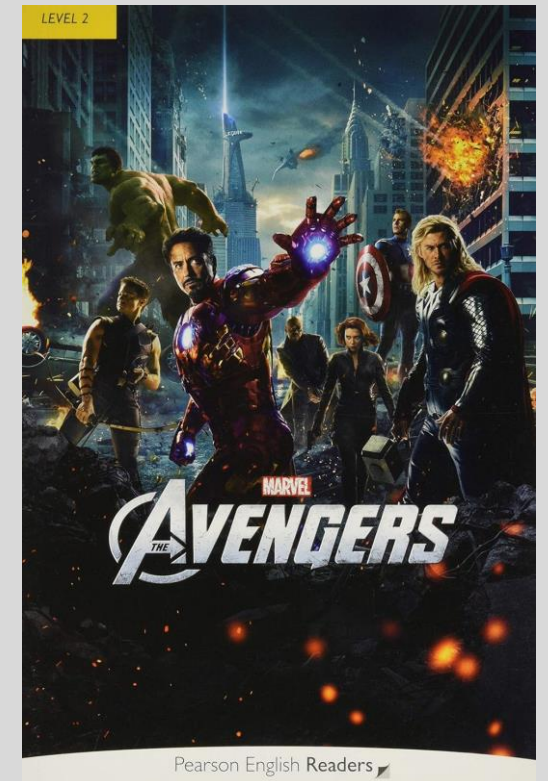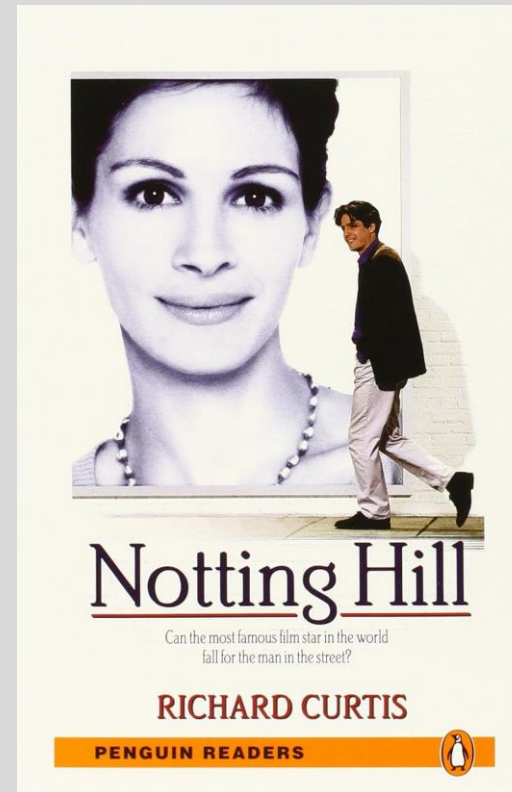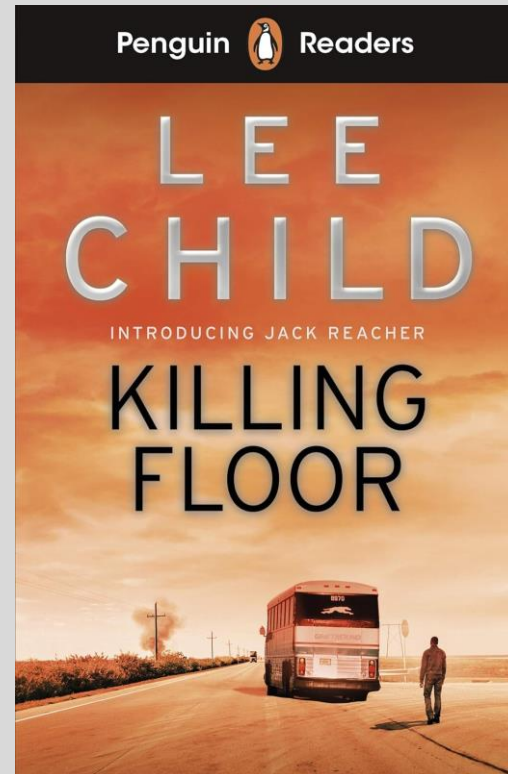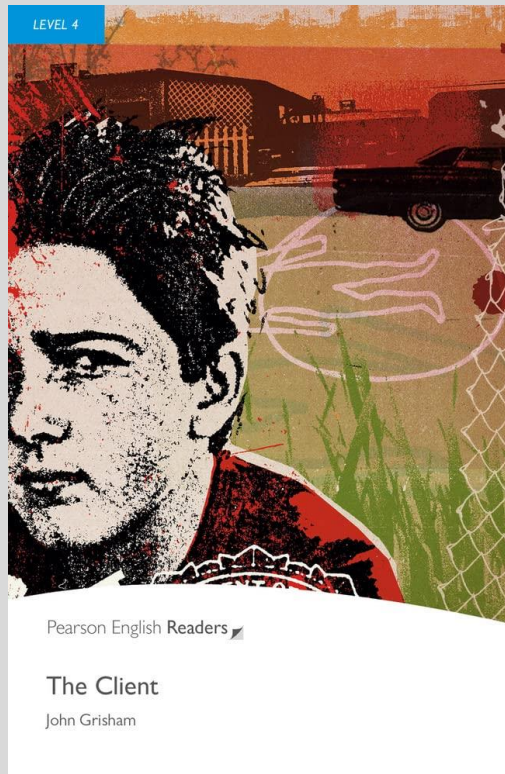Based on an idea from Hiebert & Reutzel, *Revisiting Silent Reading,* International Reading Associatino. 2010

Examples of Graded Readers

Classic literature

Sherlock Holmes More Short Stories — SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (Oxford Bookworms 2)

Pride and Prejudice — JANE AUSTEN (Oxford Bookworms 6)

A Christmas Carol — Charles Dickens (Penguin Readers)

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland — LEWIS CARROLL (Oxford Bookworms 2)

Examples of Graded Readers

Contemporary Fiction and Movie Adaptations

LEVEL 4

Pearson English Readers

The Client

John Grisham

Penguin Readers

LEE CHILD

INTRODUCING JACK REACHER

KILLING FLOOR

Notting Hill

Can the most famous film star in the world fall for the man in the street?

RICHARD CURTIS

PENGUIN READERS

LEVEL 2

MARVEL

THE AVENGERS

Pearson English Readers

Examples of Graded Readers

Non-fiction and Biographies
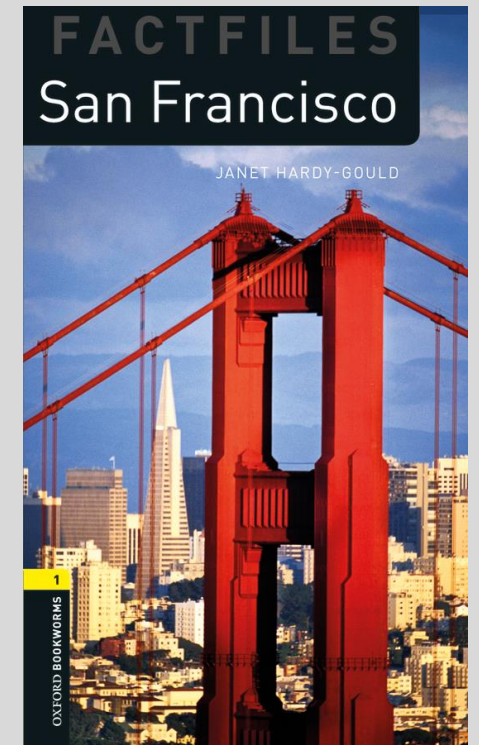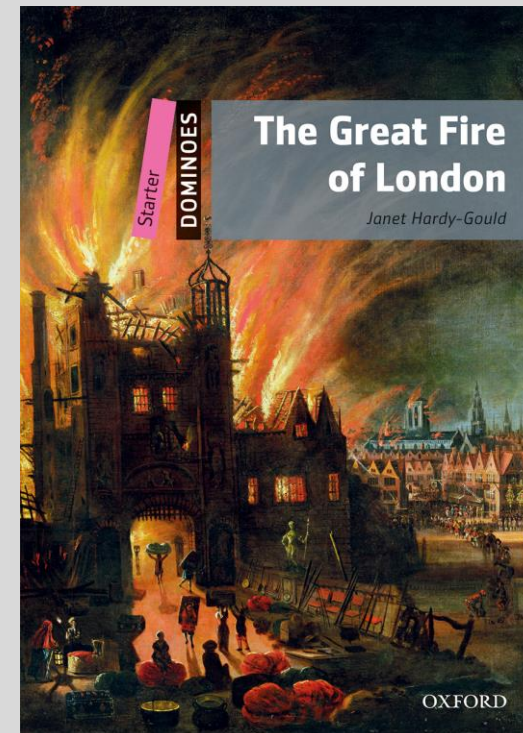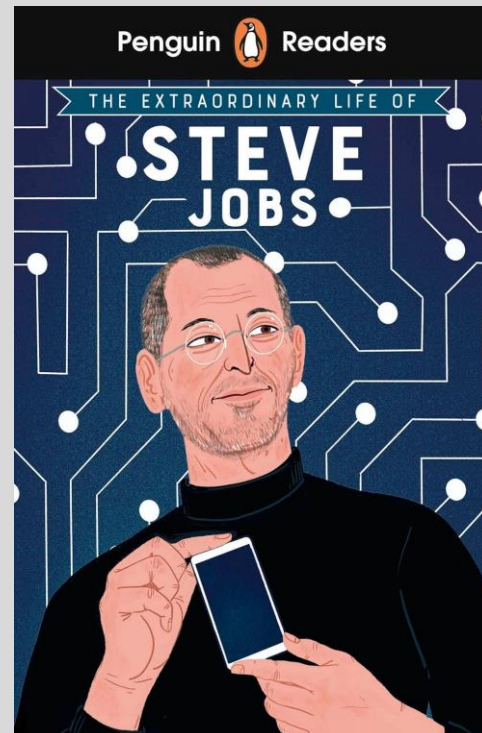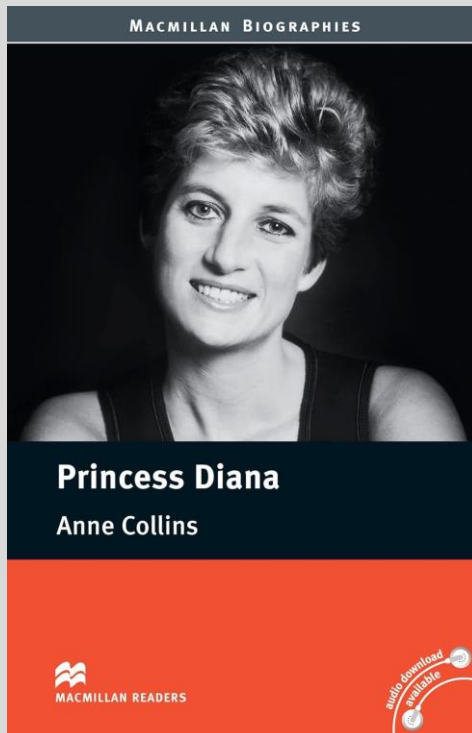
Online News Articles

As well as the graded reader books, another type of graded reading easily available to learners of English is **online news articles**. I have divided the websites with news articles into:

- **Online News Articles for English Learners**

- **Online News Articles from the Media**

Online News Articles for English Learners

1. **Breaking News English**

There are two new **mini-lessons** available every week, which can be **downloaded as PDFs**. These articles are graded as "**easier**" (Pre-intermediate - level 3) and "**harder**" (Upper-intermediate - level 6) and also include comprehension, vocabulary and other activities.

2. **News in Levels**

Each news article is presented in **three different levels**, so you can select which level suits you best. There is also the option to listen to the **audio** or watch a **video clip** of the news story.

3. **VOA News Learning English**

There is content at **three different levels**, Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced. The news articles in the Intermediate level are in **categories**, such as Health and Lifestyle, Science and Technology, and Arts and Culture. There are also **captioned videos**, such as English in a Minute, which teach everyday phrases. Here is a **guide** to this site and here is the actual VOA News **site**.

4. **Engoo**

News articles are added every day, covering a **range of topics and difficulty levels**. The levels range from 1 to 10 from Beginner to Proficient. The new **vocabulary** in each article is highlighted with definitions and example sentences and there are **discussion questions**.

Online News Articles from the Media

1. **BBC Learning News Review**

These are **short articles** based on current BBC news with videos. The **key words and phrases** are highlighted with **definitions and example sentences** and there are **quizzes**. Here is a **link** to previous news articles as well as a list of other resources from BBC Learning English.

2. **NHK World Japan News**

There is a **text** of each news story for you to read. Also, there is a **video clip** of each news story, so you can decide whether to read the text or listen to the video first.

3. **CNN 10**

The news of the day is summarized in a **10-minute video**, so there is a focus on listening. Underneath each video you can download a **transcript of the video** to read. Here is some **information** about this site.

4. **Vox**

Vox is a **general interest news site** that produces articles, videos, and podcasts with the aim to make complex ideas accessible, so everyone can understand the complicated world we live in.

Appendix 1

Publishers of graded readers use levels, such as "Elementary", or "Intermediate", but the levels may differ from publisher to publisher. Fortunately, most publishers also provide **headword counts** for each level, and these provide a **more accurate indicator**. The **ERF Graded Reader Scale** uses headword counts to provide an approximate leveling scheme for Language Learner Literature, which applies across publishers and series.

(**Note**: A headword is similar to a dictionary entry where a group of words share the same basic meaning. For example, *helps, helping, helpful, helpless*).

The Extensive Reading Foundation Graded Reader Scale

	Beginner				Elementary			Intermediate			Upper Intermediate			Advanced		
	Alphabet	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High
Headword[1] count	1-50	51-100	101-200	201-300	301-400	401-600	601-800	801-1000	1001-1250	1251-1500	1501-1800	1801-2100	2101-2400	2401-3000	3001-3600	3601-4500

Appendix 2

The "Vicious" and "Virtuous" circles of EFL Readers