

Skim, Scan, and Run

LEVEL: Intermediate to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: 20–40 minutes

BACKGROUND: Teachers often think of reading activities as silent, individual tasks in which seated students process every word in a copy of a text that the whole class is working with. Instead, in this activity, students will work in groups to practice skimming (identifying general ideas) and scanning (finding specific information) while reading several short texts. Group members will move around the room to engage with the reading texts, talk to each other, and use teamwork to answer questions about the texts.

MATERIALS: Five short texts related to any level-appropriate topic of interest; tape or pins to post the texts on the walls of the room; a blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers; paper; pencils or pens; a clock or timing device; handouts containing questions about the texts (optional)

PREPARATION:

1. Select five short texts. The five texts can focus on different subjects. It can be helpful if the texts reflect current content in your class, but the activity will work regardless of the texts you choose. For instance, you might select short articles from the local newspaper or magazines, texts from your course book, menus from restaurants, or printed song lyrics.

You don't need to spend a lot of time matching subject matter across the five texts because this activity works well even if the texts are about different topics.

2. Post one copy of each of your five texts at eye level on the walls of the classroom. Try to space the texts out around the room as much as possible. For example, you could put one text on each wall and another text outside the door. The idea is to make sure the texts are not too close together; students will need room to move around when they get up to scan and skim the texts.

You might want to identify each text by writing a letter—A, B, C, D, and E if you have five texts—at the top of each one. That will make it easy for you and the students to refer specifically to any of the texts during the activity. You could use a color code as well: “the red text,” “the orange text,” etc.

3. Create a total of ten questions about your five reading texts. For example, if your five text topics are climate change, endangered African animals, water conservation, forests, and pollution, your questions might include the following:

Skimming

- *What is climate change, and why is it an important issue?*

- *Which articles focus on how readers can help solve an environmental challenge?*
- *Which author is more optimistic about the future—the one who wrote about African animals or the one who wrote about forests?*

Scanning

- *How many rhinos are left in the world?*
 - *When is Earth Day?*
 - *What are two ways to conserve (waste less) water in your home?*
4. Before class begins, write your list of questions on the board for all to see. Make sure the questions are numbered 1 through 10. If you prefer, prepare a handout that lists the questions and make enough copies so that each student will have one.

PROCEDURE:

1. Put students in groups of three to five. Each group should have one piece of blank paper. Each group should also have a “home base,” which could be one student’s desk or a few desks pushed together.
2. Direct the students’ attention to the questions on the board (or, if you are using handouts, have student volunteers pass out one question list to each student). Explain that the groups will work as teams to find the answers to the questions by using information in the reading texts posted around the room.
3. Ask the groups to write the numbers 1 through 10 vertically on their blank piece of paper, leaving enough room between numbers to answer the questions on the board. This paper will serve as the group’s answer sheet.
4. Tell the groups that they will have ten minutes to write down answers to all ten questions; the challenge is that the answer sheet must remain at their home base at all times. In other words, students can’t carry the group’s answer sheet with them around the room as they read the texts. They must develop a plan for finding the answers, spread out and skim and scan the texts to locate answers, and then keep the answers in their heads until they return to home base, where they will write them down. You may suggest possible strategies—for example, some groups may send team members to specific texts to seek answers to any of the questions, while other groups might assign specific questions to team members, who move from text to text until they find the answers—but it is often more interesting and more fun to let groups develop their own strategies for answering the questions. Organization is a key factor if groups are going to answer all ten questions in a timely manner. And even if you don’t label this activity a race, chances are that some students will make it competitive.
5. Before beginning, tell students that since everyone will be moving around at the same time, checking the texts and returning to their home bases to write down answers, they must be courteous and careful not to run into each other. They must move quickly, efficiently, quietly, and safely (QEQS).
6. Set a timer or write the activity ending time on the board. Then start the activity. Monitor students as they work, answering questions and reminding them to move QEQS. If some groups finish before time is up, suggest that they use the remaining time to review and confirm their answers.

7. When the allocated time is up, stop the activity by saying, “Time’s up! Please return to your group’s home base.” Once students are in place, go over the answers as a class. If there are disagreements, you can have students go to the text where they found their answers, read the relevant passage, and then determine as a class which is the best answer to the question.

Don’t worry if the groups are unable to answer all the questions. One advantage of activities where students don’t finish is that everyone is working the whole time! And, during the whole-class review, it’s almost certain that every answer will have been found by at least one of the groups. Also, the game-like nature of the activity will get students moving quickly and keep them interested during the allotted time. Some groups will want to finish first since a competitive aspect is built into the task, but there is no need for the teacher to formally identify “winners” because teams are all racing against the clock.

NOTES

- Skim, Scan, and Run is an active learning game that should be done many times during a course or semester. After their first time playing, students will know the rules even though the game content is always different since you will change the questions and the reading texts. Below, under Variations, are a few of the nearly unlimited number of ways to keep the activity fresh and exciting.
- Also, while the activity involves elements of play and fun, students are still getting practice in skimming and scanning for information and in developing strategies to cooperatively solve a problem (how to find and record the answers quickly); plus, some advanced variations below ask students to use critical-thinking

skills related to predictions, deductions, or inferences. These are all skills worth practicing often.

- Finally, this game allows students to practice the QEQS method of moving around and getting things done. The QEQS method—a helpful part of your classroom management toolbox—can be applied when students are getting into groups, rotating among learning stations, and participating in other movement-focused learning tasks.

VARIATIONS

1. **Number of texts:** Increase or decrease the number of articles or texts as a way to adjust the amount of time the activity takes or to account for variations in how long or complex the texts are.
2. **Question distribution:** Don’t always assign an equal number of questions per text. For instance, you might have three questions related to two of the texts, four to another, and none to the remaining two texts that are posted. Changing the question distribution prevents the students from seeing a predictable pattern; it may cause groups to change their strategy for finding answers and still requires students to engage with all of the posted texts.
3. **Question complexity:** After playing a few times, you can make the questions more complex; you may ask students to draw inferences, make predictions, summarize, or paraphrase. For example, you could ask questions such as “How would you describe the author’s position on the future of our oceans?” and “What is a one-sentence summary of the article’s assessment of reforestation?”
4. **Supermarket “sale” advertisements:** Instead of five articles, gather and

post ten supermarket discount advertisement pages from local newspapers that show products on sale. Ask students to respond to questions and prompts such as these:

- *Find the second-most expensive window cleaner.*
- *Which toothpaste is 40 percent off?*
- *Which store is lowering the price of both tea and soap?*
- *List five products that are healthful enough to feed to your family.*

5. Infographics: Post and create questions about five to ten infographics found online or in print sources. Infographics, which present data or statistics through an eye-catching combination of images, charts, and text, are becoming common in public information notices, news articles, and popular culture media. They are full of information, and students can benefit from practice in reading them to extract key details and main ideas.

6. Audio and video texts: Turn this activity into a listening exercise by replacing the written texts with short audio or video clips. Use a digital device like your mobile phone or tablet to record and loop a short (about 20 seconds or less) audio or video clip. Create the loop by using the “repeat” feature on your playback device to automatically replay the track again and again. Put a small digital playback device in each corner of the room and start the audio loops at a relatively low volume. Students must (carefully) run to the devices and listen, find the answers to questions, and return to the home base to report and record answers.

This activity was written by **Kevin McCaughey** and is based on an activity developed by Alla McCaughey. Kevin McCaughey is a Regional English Language Officer in South Africa and the author of the article “The Movable Class: How to Class-Manage for More Active and Healthful Lessons” in this issue of *English Teaching Forum*.

Sample texts for this activity, along with questions about those texts, can be found on pages 49–52.

| Types of Texts You Can Use | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Menus | Bus/Train/Airplane schedules |
| Poems | Book covers |
| Advertisements | Song lyrics |
| Infographics | Instructions/Directions |
| Graphs | Recipes |
| Charts | Maps |
| News articles | Product labels |
| Travel brochures | Tables of contents |
| Shopping lists | A page from the dictionary |
| Comic strips | A passage from your course book |
| Posters | ... and any other kinds of texts you can think of! |

Sample Texts: Skim, Scan, and Run (Try This)

Text A

Why I Like Rhinos

Rhinos mind their own business. They like nothing better than to stand around and eat grass from the ground, or, depending on what kind of rhino, nip leaves off bushes. They love to roll in the mud, too. Mud keeps rhinos cool, and they use it for sunscreen.

I've sat in my car and watched rhinos many times. Recently, I watched one lick a rock for 20 minutes.

"Rock-licker," I called him.

Then he rubbed his chin on the rock. And his stomach. And his hips.

"Rock-rubber," I called him.

Rhinos have marvelous ears. Have you ever looked at a rhino ear? It is somehow like a curled leaf, or flower petals, or a gracefully rolled paper cone for holding nuts.

Rhinos seem mythical or magical to some people. Maybe that is because they have a horn. Actually, they have two horns, but one is more prominent. Maybe rhinos are behind the idea of the unicorn. When people see something near-magical in an animal, they want that thing. In the case of rhinos, it's the horn. So people kill the rhinos and cut off their horns, even though the horns are made of the same kind of protein that's in your hair or fingernails. But people who want magic horns don't like to hear that. They don't seem to care that there are only about 30,000 rhinos left in the world today.

I wish they would mind their own business.

Rhinos mind their own business. They eat grass. They lick rocks. They rub rocks. They don't try to sell you anything or ask for favors. A living rhino makes a fine acquaintance. Take time to get to know rhinos on World Rhino Day, celebrated every year on September 22.

Text B

The Pacific Garbage Patch

Did you know that water currents in the northern Pacific Ocean capture a huge amount of garbage? Plastic and other types of man-made waste float on the surface and circulate below the water. It is difficult to measure how much trash is in the ocean because a lot of the trash has broken down into tiny pieces. As a result, this polluted region is more like "trash soup" than a solid "island of trash" that is easy to see. Some reports estimate that this area, known as the Pacific Garbage Patch, covers 700,000 square kilometers (270,000 square miles), while others say the area is as big as 15,000,000 square kilometers (5,800,000 square miles).

The Pacific Garbage Patch causes many environmental concerns. The small pieces of plastic in the patch are called “microplastic”; they are hard to collect and clean up. Microplastic that escapes the garbage patch washes up on shores. In the United States, plastic pollution from the patch is a big problem in coastal Alaska. Also, fish and other creatures, like sea turtles and birds, think microplastic is food. Eating microplastic can harm animals; it can choke them, poison them, and affect their ability to reproduce. People also consume fish that have eaten microplastic, exposing them to harmful chemicals found in some plastic products.

Text C

Polar Bears



The infographic features a vertical strip on the left showing a close-up of sea ice with small blue plastic fragments. The main content is on a dark blue background with white and light blue text. It includes a photo of a polar bear with her cubs on ice. The text provides facts about their habitat, swimming ability, and conservation status.

POLAR BEARS

DID YOU KNOW?

Polar bears live in Arctic coastal areas and on sea ice.

❄ ❄ ❄

Polar bears do spend time in the water and on land, but they hunt for food, rest, and raise their cubs on the sea ice.

Aa **SCIENTIFIC NAME**
Ursus maritimus; "sea bear"

 **WEIGHT**
800 - 1,300 pounds (360 - 590 kg)

 **HEIGHT**
6 - 10 feet (1.8 - 3 m)

 **POPULATION**
22,000-51,000

POLAR BEARS CAN SWIM more than 60 miles (100 km) without rest TO FIND FOOD.

WILL THAT BE FAR ENOUGH IF SEA ICE KEEPS MELTING?

 In 2008, these marine mammals were listed as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act because their habitat is being lost due to climate change.

Infographic by Heather Benucci

Text D

The Grasshopper

I was in the airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. I walked into the little duty-free shop. The woman who worked there decided to follow me around, maybe to keep an eye on me. And my eye fell upon two boxes of perfume on a glass shelf, and in between them was a large green-and-gold grasshopper holding itself perfectly still. I said to the woman, “A grasshopper?” And she said, “Yes, a grasshopper.” And I said, “Oh? Is he alive?” And she said, “Yes, alive.” And then she turned and walked away as if I were crazy to think that there would ever be a dead grasshopper between their perfume bottles on a glass shelf.

Text E

Taking Care of Our Oceans

Oceans provide a home to amazing creatures like fish, marine mammals, sea reptiles, and coral. Oceans are a renewable source of food and power for humans, and they generate most of the planet’s oxygen by supporting sea plants like kelp, algae, and plankton. Oceans also help to regulate global temperatures.

Unfortunately, although humans receive many benefits from oceans, we are their biggest enemy, as consumers of energy and as polluters. Have you thought about how your daily activities affect the health of our oceans? Making simple changes in your routines can have a positive impact. Here are a few things you can do:

- Dispose of trash properly. Don’t litter on land or in water!
- Recycle or reuse materials. Plastic items, including bottles, can be particularly harmful to oceans and to sea creatures. Use reusable food or drink containers. Buy or make reusable shopping bags.
- Reduce your “carbon footprint” (the amount of energy that you use from nonrenewable sources). Bike, walk, carpool, or take public transportation to work and school. Use energy-efficient lights and appliances, and turn them off when no one is using them.
- Participate in a beach, river, or lake cleanup project. Or just pick up trash you see in these areas when you visit them.

Possible Questions

Skimming

- How does the author of the text about rhinos feel about them?
- Do you think the author of the text about rhinos takes time to enjoy the beauty found in nature? Why or why not?
- Do you think the author of the text about rhinos would support hunting animals for sport? Why or why not?
- What is the author’s purpose for writing the text about rhinos?
- How would you describe the Pacific Garbage Patch?
- Why should readers be concerned about the Pacific Garbage Patch?
- Which two texts describe problems related to ocean environments? Which of these texts offers advice about how to solve the problems?
- What is the author’s purpose for writing the text about protecting oceans?
- Why is a warmer climate a threat to polar bears?
- How would you summarize the problem facing polar bears in the Arctic?
- Why do you think the author of the text about the grasshopper asked the woman about the grasshopper?
- Why do you think the author of the text about the grasshopper was in the shop?

Scanning

- Some people hunt and kill rhinos. What part of the rhino’s body do they want?
- What day do people around the world celebrate rhinos?
- How many rhinos are in the world?
- What are two ways that mud is helpful to rhinos?
- According to the author, what part of a rhino’s body looks like a curled leaf?
- What are two ways microplastic can hurt animals or people?
- What is the larger estimate for the size of the Pacific Garbage Patch?
- What are two kinds of sea plants that produce the oxygen in the air we breathe?
- What are two ways to reduce the amount of plastic waste that pollutes oceans?
- How many polar bears can be found in the wild today?
- How far can a polar bear swim without resting?
- When was the polar bear named a “threatened species”?
- What does the polar bear’s scientific name mean in English?
- What color was the grasshopper that is mentioned in one of the texts?
- Was the grasshopper in the text real or fake?

Notes on the Texts and Questions

These sample texts and questions were contributed by Kevin McCaughey and Heather Benucci.

Please note that it is possible to mix different types of texts (different genres). You can mix texts on different topics, too.

You can use texts with or without titles. Titles often let students know what the general topic of the text is.

Remember, you need only ten questions for this activity. Extra questions are provided here as examples.