



Reading for pleasure

Ideas to inspire

HE students



Ideas to inspire HE students

'The National Year of Reading gives us a great opportunity to work together to promote reading for pleasure to adults who are improving their skills.'

*David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills,
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*

'If you read, the world has never been more accessible and more exciting. If you don't, the door on opportunity has never been more firmly shut. By starting with what people love – be it sport, music, film, family history, magazines or adventure gaming – the National Year of Reading is a perfect opportunity to weave a rich variety of reading into all your work with learners.'

Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director, National Year of Reading

'I can underestimate learners' understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.' *Adult literacy tutor*

Start with what you love. This is the message of the National Year of Reading. And this is the message for adult learners as much as for any other audience.

The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme, together with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), have created this series of ideas packs for practitioners working with adults in a range of different settings. **This pack contains ideas to inspire learners in higher education. There is a full list of all the packs available on page 9.**

The aim is to support you in introducing learners to reading in all its forms – books, magazines, websites, lyrics – not just this year, but every year. We need to widen people's concept of reading so that they can think of themselves as 'readers' whatever kind of reading they enjoy. We know that learners can get the reading bug if they are encouraged to choose what they read and can share their experience of reading with others. Reading needs to fit into their busy lives, be relevant to their interests and concerns but also to surprise them with new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

Research tells us that reading for pleasure 'helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills'. Libraries are ideally placed to support learners as they discover an enjoyment of reading of all kinds. But other organisations also have expertise and resources to offer, which can help to engage people in a love of reading. Local authorities, colleges, prisons, trade unions, businesses and voluntary organisations have all made a commitment to use the National Year of Reading to create new readers.

Please make good use of these ideas while the profile for reading is high and help us to make 2008 an exciting point in their reading journey for adult learners across the country.

Genevieve Clarke, The Vital Link and **Jenny Cobley**, NIACE

See www.yearofreading.org.uk for more information about the National Year of Reading.

Introduction

Learners in higher education are diverse and academic reading at this level can present particular challenges to some students. There are students who are speaking English as a second language and who may be new to the UK education system; students with dyslexia; and those who have returned to learning after a period of time in the workplace whose reading skills have become rusty. Some students may have grown up in homes with very limited access to books and all students will vary in their confidence in reading and their attitude towards reading, especially reading for pleasure.

Without proper support, some of these students may fail to reach their potential. One of the ways in which staff in Higher Education institutions can help is by encouraging students to develop their reading skills. Encouraging reading for pleasure is a great way of achieving this, and is likely to lead to improvements in a student's academic reading ability. By directing students towards relevant fiction, popular non-fiction and first-hand accounts, academic staff can help students to develop reading confidence as well as useful background knowledge. Students who read around their subject are likely to be more engaged and will find it easier to understand complex themes and issues. They may also find it easier to make links between subjects. In this way, reading for pleasure can complement the academic reading that students are required to complete for their course.

Perhaps most importantly, introducing students to accessible and enjoyable texts has the potential to break down barriers to learning, and will help students to gain maximum benefit from the Higher Education experience.

Top ten ideas

- 1.** Direct students towards fiction and popular non-fiction books that they can read before they begin their course. For example, Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* might be suitable for students who are about to begin a philosophy degree, but have little prior knowledge of the subject.
- 2.** Include up-to-date biographies or autobiographies on the reading list to support those students who may be struggling to engage with the subject. For example, students studying politics could read part of Nelson Mandela's *A Long Walk to Freedom* before beginning a module on South Africa. This might help to develop their interest in and background knowledge of the subject
- 3.** Divide reading lists into sections, so that students can see which texts provide accessible introductions to a subject. The sections might be headed 'accessible', 'intermediate level' and 'more complex'. An accessible text for physics students studying 'dark matter' might be *The Science of Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials'* by Mary and John Gribbin. Students with slower reading speeds often struggle to pick out the key points in texts, and will appreciate a frame around which they can build up to more complex ideas.
- 4.** When introducing a complex idea or theory, start with a case study drawn from fiction. For example, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* could be used as a way of introducing some of the themes around the treatment of mental health difficulties. This approach might benefit students who have a preference for analytical rather than holistic learning.
- 5.** Encourage students to form book groups outside of their taught sessions. In the group, students can read and discuss fictional subject matter as a way in to discussing issues that are relevant to their course. This need not involve input from staff, other than to make some suggestions about relevant texts.
- 6.** Offer students the opportunity to post reviews and comments about relevant fiction and popular non-fiction on the Virtual Learning Environment. If students have successfully formed a book group, the VLE could include a section that gives dates and times of meetings.
- 7.** Direct students who are developing their English language skills to titles in the Quick Reads series for emergent readers such as Colin Jackson's *Life's New Hurdles*. These books may be particularly helpful to students who are speaking English as a second language and who have not lived in the UK prior to enrolment.

Top ten ideas cont...

- 8.** Encourage students to visit the Student Learning Centre (or equivalent) where they can receive assistance in improving their reading skills. Staff will work with students to improve speed and efficiency of reading, and can use course-related texts in order to do this.
- 9.** Encourage students to read fiction and popular non-fiction as a means of helping to improve writing skills. Sentence construction, critical analysis and different writing styles can be studied in this way. Staff in Student Services Departments will often provide sessions on these topics.
- 10.** Direct students to their public library as a way of encouraging them to develop their general reading skills. Students do not always realise that they can meet with a Librarian who will help them to select something suitable. 2008 is the National Year of Reading, and libraries will be supporting this through a range of reading offers, activities and events.

Case study 1:

Helping a student with dyslexia to read for pleasure

A student who had been receiving weekly support throughout the second year of her degree programme asked whether she could continue to see a learning support tutor during the long summer vacation. She had enrolled via an Access to Higher Education course and had recently discovered that she was dyslexic. The student was struggling with aspects of her course and wanted to focus specifically on reading skills. She planned to devote the long summer holiday to improving her vocabulary and reading speed.

The student, with the tutor, thought about the different ways in which these aims could be achieved and then devised a plan of action. They met on a weekly basis to work through a structured reading programme. Alongside this, it was agreed that the student would devote some time every day to reading for pleasure, and report on her progress at the weekly meeting. The student had never read for pleasure and didn't know where to start: she had no idea that she could ask for help from a member of staff in a public library, or that staff could help her to select an appropriate book.

The following week, the student arrived at the session to report that she had met up with a librarian, who had helped her to find a large print book that wasn't too long. She was delighted with this, because she had previously been put off by the sheer number of books on offer, and didn't know how to select something she would enjoy. She hadn't realised that large print books were available, or that someone could help her find something that was at a suitable reading level.

Alongside this, the student was also encouraged to read a Sunday newspaper. She hadn't thought of this as a way of widening her reading, but was enthusiastic about it because the articles were short, and there were a number of articles that were relevant to her degree course in criminology. The student had previously thought of reading for pleasure as solely confined to books, and hadn't considered that reading newspapers and magazines could also help her to improve her skills.

At the end of the summer vacation, the student had become a regular user of her local library, and felt that she was making progress with her reading speed and vocabulary. As a result, she felt more confident about undertaking the final year of her course.

Case study 2:

Using fiction to help students' dissertations

Final year students in the Politics Department are required to complete a 10,000 word dissertation. Each student is allocated a dissertation supervisor, and can approach the supervisor for help with any aspect of the process. The department realised that a number of students were not making use of this service, and were failing to produce a dissertation that was of the same standard as their assessed essays. The problem appeared to be that certain students felt completely daunted by the idea of such a lengthy piece of work, and the idea of formulating their own title. They also felt lost without a reading list. The students didn't know where to start, but felt nervous about admitting this to their supervisor.

The department decided to address this by offering small group sessions that were focused on Getting Started. A major focus of the session was how to select a topic area and title. Students were encouraged to think about areas that they were interested in – perhaps using previously completed modules as a starting point. Once they had decided on a broad area of interest, it was suggested that students begin by reading fictional and autobiographical works. For example, a student who had enjoyed a Chinese politics module might be encouraged to read sections of *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang. In this way, less confident students could use fiction and more accessible texts to focus their interest, and begin to formulate some possible dissertation questions. It was felt that this was particularly important for students who might otherwise become stuck at this initial stage, and spend far too long thinking about a title. The department also felt that it might avoid instances of students going to see dissertation supervisors with no idea at all about what they wanted to research and write about.

This approach not only helped students to get started, but also helped them to understand the more complex ideas that they encountered in journal articles and textbooks at a later stage. It cut down on the extra time that might have been spent if students had gone straight to the journal articles and textbooks before deciding on their focus. This approach also decreased the risk of students feeling overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of information.

Some students still found the task daunting, but using fiction and autobiography as a starting point helped them to use their time more efficiently. It also helped them to engage with and begin to enjoy the task.

Resources

First Choice Books at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk offers an online searchable database of books that are suitable for adult learners who want to develop their reading confidence.

Quick Reads are short books aimed at adult readers who are seeking to develop their reading skills. A full list of titles are available on the website at www.quickreads.org.uk. Audio versions are available from libraries or W F Howes Ltd as part of their Clipper Emergent Reader programme (sales@wfhowes.co.uk 01664 423000). Downloadable files providing ideas for using the books can be found via www.vitallink.org.uk. Web quests linked to some of the Quick Reads titles on <http://www.quickreadsideas.org.uk/web.php> will stretch more confident learners and broaden their reading and their interests.

The 'Introducing...' series offers a concise introduction to key ideas – see **Introducing Books** – www.introducingbooks.com. The authors tend to be university lecturers. The books are short and, as they use a mixture of text and graphics, are therefore ideal for visual learners. Titles include *Introducing Sociology* and *Introducing Philosophy* as well as more specific topics within those disciplines such as *Introducing Nietzsche* and *Introducing Marx*.

Your Guide to Physics on the Web at www.physics.org/featuredetail.asp?newsid=17 provides links to fictional books that feature cutting-edge science. The titles provide accessible introductions to scientific concepts, such as Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Orion Books have launched a series of literary classics that have cut up to 40% from the original content – see **In Half the Time – Compact Editions** – www.orionbooks.co.uk. The aim is to make these titles more accessible, and to roll out the project so that between 50 and 100 titles are available in a scaled-down form.

Reading Strategies at www.palgrave.com/skills4study/studyskills/learning/reading.asp offers a range of reading strategies designed for students in Higher Education. The Skills4Study site is the web version of Stella Cottrell's book – *The Study Skills Handbook*. It is full of useful advice covering a range of study skills that are needed in a Higher Education context.

Inspire at <http://www.inspire2.org.uk> aims to facilitate access to a range of libraries (public, university and specialist) for members of the public. The site includes a search engine that allows users to search for specific information and the libraries that hold that information. It also includes a list of participating libraries.

Full list of *Ideas to inspire packs*

New readers 1 (up to Adult Literacy Entry Level 2)

New readers 2 (Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 – Level 2)

Parents and carers of young children

Dads and male carers of young children

ESOL learners

People in prisons and young offender institutions

People in the workplace

FE college students

HE students

Readers with additional needs

These packs are available to download as individual PDF files from www.vitallink.org.uk or www.niace.org.uk

Photographs of braille reading and flower-seller reading novel by Sim Canetty-Clarke

We welcome all feedback on these ideas and on how you are promoting reading to your learners. Please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk



The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. See www.vitallink.org.uk



NIACE is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different learners. See www.niace.org.uk