

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR READING AND WRITING IN THE REAL CLASSROOM.

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Annotation: This practical guide moves beyond theory to explore actionable, classroom-tested strategies for teaching reading and writing in high school. It argues that effective instruction must be rooted in cognitive science (how the brain learns), responsive to our digital world (multimodal literacy), and connected to real-world purposes (genre and communication). By comparing common global practices with the evolving context of Central Asian education—particularly in Uzbekistan—the article provides a culturally-aware framework. It features real examples, from vocabulary webs to digital storytelling, and demonstrates how techniques like strategic annotation and diagnostic feedback can transform student outcomes. Designed for the busy educator, this piece offers a clear toolkit to help students become confident, critical, and creative communicators.

Keywords: Classroom practice, Reading strategies, Writing instruction, Scaffolding, Multimodal literacy, Genre pedagogy, Formative feedback, Comparative education, Uzbekistan, High school EFL, Digital storytelling.

Introduction: The Classroom Where Words Come Alive

Let's start with a familiar scene. A teacher in Samarkand projects a dense text about the Silk Road onto the board. Students silently scan the paragraphs, their minds cluttered with unfamiliar terms like “caravan” and “cultural diffusion.” Across the world, in a classroom in Toronto, a student stares at a blinking cursor, paralyzed by an essay prompt asking her to “analyze a historical trade route’s impact.” Both scenes share a common ailment: a disconnect. The act of absorbing language is treated as separate from the act of producing it. Yet, what if the key to unlocking both lies in fusing them?

Modern education tells us that literacy is far more than decoding symbols or stringing together correct sentences. As scholar Jeremy Harmer reminds us, it's a complex cognitive dance involving memory, prediction, and constant revision [1]. It's about making meaning. And in today's world, meaning isn't confined to textbooks—it's in the explosive interplay of text, image, and sound on a smartphone screen, what researcher Julie Coiro terms **multimodal literacy** [2]. This article is a practical blueprint for that fusion. We'll explore not just *why* but *how* to build bridges between reading and writing, drawing on global best practices and tailoring them to the vibrant, unique context of classrooms in Uzbekistan and beyond. Forget abstract theory; this is about the chalk-dust, the shared Google Doc, the “aha!” moment when a student's idea finally finds its voice.

Part 1: The Foundation – How Our Brains Build Literacy

Before we dive into activities, let's understand the engine. Teaching is most effective when it aligns with how students learn.

The Cognitive Load: Reading and writing are neurologically demanding. Reading requires decoding, accessing vocabulary from memory (lexical access), and holding ideas in

your mental workspace (working memory) to understand a sentence’s end by its beginning. Writing is even more taxing: you must plan an idea, find the words, structure them grammatically, and physically transcribe them—all while self-editing. Isolating these skills overloads separate circuits. Integrating them, however, creates efficiency. The vocabulary wrestled with in a reading passage becomes the very toolkit for the next writing task, cementing learning.

Schema Theory – The Mental Filing Cabinet: Imagine a student’s prior knowledge as a filing cabinet. **Schema Theory** (Anderson & Pearson) says we understand new information by filing it with related old information [3]. A student reading about climate change will comprehend it better if we first “open the drawer” labeled *weather*, *news reports*, or *hot summers*. A simple pre-reading discussion—“What comes to mind when you hear ‘global warming’?”—activates these schemata, building a scaffold for new concepts to cling to.

Genre as a Social Blueprint: Every piece of writing has a job and a community. A text message, a lab report, and a political speech follow different unwritten rules—these are **genres**. Genre pedagogy, inspired by John Swales, teaches these rules explicitly [4]. It tells students: “Let’s read this excellent opinion column not just for *what* it says, but for *how* it works. How does the writer hook you? Where is the main argument? What kind of evidence is used?” Reading becomes reverse-engineering. Writing becomes applying the blueprint. It demystifies “good writing” and empowers students to participate in different conversations.

Part 2: A World of Practice – From Global Trends to Local Classrooms

Educational approaches are shaped by culture and history. A glance at global practices reveals a spectrum.

In many Western systems (e.g., Finland, Canada), integration is seamless. Literacy is a cross-curricular habit. A history project on the Industrial Revolution involves analysing workers’ letters (*reading*) and then writing and recording a podcast script from a factory child’s perspective (*writing & digital multimodality*). Feedback is often formative and peer-driven, focusing on the process.

In Uzbekistan, the educational landscape is one of proud tradition and exciting transition. The legacy system, with its deep strength in grammatical precision and literary analysis, has often emphasised mastery of the *product*—the perfectly parsed sentence, the error-free composition. Reading can focus on intensive translation, writing on controlled replication. This builds formidable accuracy but can sometimes sideline creative expression and the messy, iterative *process* of real-world communication.

Yet, change is palpable. Uzbek educators are innovating. Researchers like **Karimov** have shown how **digital storytelling**—where students blend personal narrative with images and sound—can boost engagement and coherence, speaking directly to the multimodal reality students inhabit [5]. This isn’t about rejecting tradition, but enriching it: pairing grammatical care with creative purpose.

Comparative Lens: Two Classrooms, One Goal

Aspect	Common Global Integrated Practice	Traditional Uzbek Practice (Evolving)	Practical Synthesis for Today
Starting Point	A question, problem, or provocative image.	A text or a grammar rule.	A compelling "mentor text" that models the day’s genre or skill.
Vocabulary Work	In-context discovery,	Pre-teaching lists, translation, later use	"Track and Attack": Find new words in the reading,

	semantic mapping, use in immediate writing.	in fill-in-blanks.	map their relationships, then mandate their use in the follow-up writing task.
The Teacher's Role	Facilitator, coach, fellow writer.	Primary authority, knowledge source, corrector.	The "Master Craftsman": Demonstrates techniques, provides live feedback, and values the journey as much as the destination.
View of Error	A window into thinking; a chance to learn.	A mistake to be eliminated.	Diagnostic Data: Errors in writing reveal gaps in reading comprehension or schema, guiding the next mini-lesson.
Technology's Role	Essential for creation, collaboration, and accessing authentic texts.	Often limited to presentation or word processing.	The Creative Amplifier: Used for collaborative annotation, creating digital stories, and connecting with authentic audiences online.

Part 3: The Toolkit – Practical Strategies You Can Use Monday

Here’s where theory meets the classroom floor. These are adaptable activities for the high school EFL classroom.

Strategy 1: The Annotation Sprint with Instant Synthesis

- **The Practice:** Adapted from research like **Sodiqova’s** on annotation, this makes reading active and immediately useful for writing [6].

- **How it Works:**

1. **Set the Mission:** “Today, we are idea detectives. Read this short article on ‘The Rise of Social Media Influencers.’ Your tools?” Teach simple annotation marks: ? for confusion, ! for surprise, → for connection, ** for main idea.
2. **Sprint & Mark:** Give a tight 8-minute reading/annotation sprint.
3. **Quickfire Share:** In pairs, students share one ? and one ** they found.
4. **Instant Synthesis Writing:** Now, the pivot to writing: “Based on your detective work, write a single, powerful tweet (max. 280 characters) summarizing the article’s core argument or most surprising point.” The reading annotations directly fuel the concise writing task.

- **Why it Thrills:** It’s fast, collaborative, and mirrors how we actually process information online—reading quickly and formulating a response.

Strategy 2: Genre Transformation – From Report to Rallying Cry

- **The Practice:** This applies genre pedagogy in a creative, multimodal way.

- **How it Works:**

1. **Deconstruct the Model:** Students read a factual, neutral news report about a local issue (e.g., “Central Park’s Old Trees in Decline”).
2. **Analyze the Blueprint:** Discuss: What’s the tone? Who is the audience? How is it structured? (Swales’ move analysis) [4].
3. **The Transformation Challenge:** “Now, transform this information for a new genre and audience. Using the *same facts*, create a **storyboard for a 60-second video** aimed at convincing young people to care. You need a visual plan, a key quote (text on screen), and a 30-word voiceover script.”

- **Why it Thrills:** It's a creative puzzle. Students must deeply understand the content (reading) to repurpose it, wrestling with tone, audience, and multimodal design (writing/creating).

Strategy 3: Semantic Word Webs for Vocabulary That Sticks

- **The Practice:** Moving beyond lists, based on Nation's work on lexical competence [7].
- **How it Works:**
 1. **Find the Anchor:** From a reading text, choose a pivotal concept (e.g., "sustainability").
 2. **Build the Web:** In the center of the board, write "SUSTAINABILITY." Ask students: "What actions are part of it?" (Recycling, conserving). "What are its opposites?" (Waste, pollution). "What are its benefits?" (Clean air, future). Draw lines, creating a web.
 3. **The Writing Mandate:** The follow-up writing prompt **must require using at least 3 words from the web.** "Write a persuasive paragraph to your principal, using *sustainability*, *conserving*, and *future*, arguing for a school garden."

- **Why it Thrills:** It visually connects words, building a network of meaning in the brain. The immediate application in writing moves words from the textbook page into the student's own voice.

Strategy 4: Feedback Loops That Build Confidence, Not Fear

- **The Practice:** Moving from red-pen correction to formative dialogue, as highlighted by Black and Wiliam [8].
- **How it Works:**
 1. **Focus on ONE Thing:** For a writing assignment, tell students, "My feedback will focus *only* on your thesis statements this time. Ignore my comments on grammar for now."
 2. **Use "Glow and Grow":** For each student, give one specific praise ("Glow": "Your thesis clearly states your position on tourism.") and one specific, actionable suggestion ("Grow": "Try adding a 'because' clause to preview your main reason.>").
 3. **Revision as Requirement:** Build in 10 minutes of the next class for students to *apply* the feedback and rewrite just that one sentence. This closes the loop.
- **Why it Thrills:** It makes feedback manageable and less intimidating. Students see tangible improvement quickly, building a growth mindset.

Conclusion: Cultivating Architects, Not Just Bricklayers

The goal of reading and writing instruction is not to produce perfect test-takers, but to nurture **architects of meaning**. An architect needs to understand materials (vocabulary), study great structures (mentor texts), know the rules of physics and design (genre), and respond to a community's needs (audience and purpose). Our classrooms must be their studios.

For the teacher in Samarkand, this might mean pairing a beautiful passage from Alisher Navoi with a task to write a modern-day parable on the same theme. It means using a diagnostic glance at student writing to see if confusion stems from a missed cultural reference in a reading text. It's about honouring the profound depth of the existing educational culture while opening new, practical windows to the world.

By weaving together cognitive science, digital fluency, and explicit strategy instruction, we give our students more than skills. We give them agency. We transform the silent scan of a text and the dread of the blank page into a confident, ongoing conversation with the world. That is the ultimate thrill of teaching—watching a young person discover not just what words say, but what *they themselves* can say with them.

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