

Reading: notes, signs and messages

English A1

What this topic teaches

A1 reading is not reading everything; it is reading for the **purpose**. A note on a door, a sign on a wall and a text on a phone each want something from you. Find what, and you have read them.

- Every short text answers three questions: Who wrote it? For whom? What must I do?
- Signs speak in capitals and few words: NO PARKING means the rule, not a suggestion.
- Memory hook: read like a **detective**: three questions, then act.

Signs: the rules in capitals

Public **signs** are laws in two words. They use capitals, no polite words, and often no verbs at all.

Sign	What it wants
NO PARKING	rule: leave the car elsewhere
MIND THE STEP	warning: watch your feet
PUSH / PULL	instruction: the door only opens one way
STAFF ONLY	limit: this door is not for you
KEEP OFF THE GRASS	rule: walk around, not across



rule warning instruction limit rule

Five signs and their jobs

- Signs use the simplest verbs: NO, MIND, PUSH, PULL, KEEP, DO NOT.
- One sign, one job. If you must read it twice, you are over-reading it.

■ A first try

Match the sign to the place.

- MIND THE GAP (train station)
- SILENCE, EXAM IN PROGRESS (library or exam hall)
- EXIT (everywhere: the way out)

Notes and messages: find the action

A **note** or message is a small text with a job: telling you to do something. Read it in three steps: the names, the time-and-place, the action.

Part	Example
who	Mum, Lin, Mr Chen
when / where	at 6, on the table, Room 12
action	please call, buy milk, wait for me

- **Worked note:** *Lin: football starts at 4.15 today, not 5. Bring your blue shirt. Dad.* Names: Lin and Dad. Time: 4.15. Actions: bring the shirt, remember the change.

Lin: football starts

at 4.15 today, not 5.

Bring your blue shirt.

Dad

who: Lin and Dad

when: 4.15, not 5

action: bring the shirt

Read a note for who, when and the action

Scanning: the eyes' fast walk

To **scan** is to walk your eyes quickly over the page looking for one thing: a time, a name, a price. Scanning finds facts; careful reading finds meaning.

- Know what you are looking for BEFORE your eyes move.
- Numbers and capital letters are the brightest stones in the river: dates, times, names, places.

- Read the found sentence fully, then stop. A1 texts rarely hide a second trick.

■ Scan this

Hi Mei, the class trip is on Saturday 14 May. The bus leaves at 8.30 from the school gate. Bring lunch and water. Wear walking shoes. Ms Gao.

- Day and date? (Saturday 14 May)
- Time and place? (8.30, school gate)
- What to bring, and what to wear? (lunch and water; walking shoes)

Guessing the one unknown word

Meet one new word in a short text? Let the sentence guess it for you.

- *The soup was too hot, so I blew on it.* Blow: you know what happens before it.
- Do not stop at the new word; finish the sentence, then look back.
- If the word is not the action and not the time, it can wait.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not translate word by word; the three questions are faster.
- Do not miss the small change-makers: NOT, at, before, after. *Class is at 8* and *before 8* are different days of your life.
- Capital letters are names, days, months and rules; they are the skeleton of the text.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. The three questions of every short text: name them. – **Who wrote it? For whom? What must I do?**
2. What does STAFF ONLY want from you? – **Don't go in:** the door is only for people who work there.
3. In the class-trip message: what time, what place, what to bring? – **8.30, the school gate; lunch and water** (and wear walking shoes).
4. Find the trap: *The class is at 8.* / *The class is before 8.* – **at 8** is exactly eight o'clock; **before 8** is earlier, at 7.30 for example.

■ Practice: read and act

1. A sign on a door says **PULL**. What do you do?
2. A note on the fridge: *Tom: Grandma is coming at 6. Please clean your room and buy some bread after school. Mum.* Who wrote it? What two things must Tom do? When does Grandma come?

3. A text: *Hi Ana, the swimming class is in Pool B today, not Pool A. Same time, 4 o'clock. Coach Wu.* What changed? What did not change?
4. *I was so tired that I yawned all through the film.* What does *yawned* probably mean?

Answers. 5 **Pull the door towards you.** 6 **Mum; clean his room and buy bread; at 6.** 7 **The pool** (B, not A); **the time** (4 o'clock). 8 **Opened your mouth wide because you are tired** – *so tired that* tells you what kind of action it is.