

## 2 Skimming and scanning

Two reading techniques you will often use in your academic studies are skimming and scanning.

- Skimming means reading parts of a text, such as the title, sub-headings and the first sentences in paragraphs, to understand its purpose, its organisation and the main ideas.
- Scanning means looking quickly through a text for specific information.

2.1 As you read in preparation for writing an essay, would you skim or scan a text to find:

- 1 the most important sections to read. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 definitions of key terms. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 if it would be worth reading the text in detail. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 what the writer's general view on the topic is. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 statistics to include in the essay. \_\_\_\_\_

2.2 Your tutor has asked you to prepare for a lecture by reading a text with the title *Why should we prioritize?*

a Before you start reading, consider the things in the box that most national governments have to spend money on. In pairs, try to agree on their order of importance.

agricultural improvement	arts and culture	education	health care
industrial development	law and order	national security	

b Did you have difficulties agreeing? If so, why?

2.3 Skim the text and decide which sentence best summarises the main idea.

- 1 National governments are good at prioritising, so they should also decide the order in which global problems are dealt with.
- 2 We cannot deal with all global problems at the same time, so we have to find ways of deciding the order in which they are dealt with.
- 3 The world's major problems are all of equal importance, so we should try to deal with them all at the same time.

### Why should we prioritize?

Tremendous progress has been made in our lifetimes. People in most countries live longer, healthier lives; air and water quality in the developed world is generally getting better; and a much larger population is being adequately fed.

5 But there are still many problems to tackle. The minority of us lucky enough to have been born in the developed world take for granted universal education, an assured food supply and clean, piped water. Hundreds of millions of people are not so lucky. And although the world's problems fall disproportionately heavily on the developing world, rich countries also have their own problems, including drugs, conflicts and corruption.

10 When it comes to the globe's toughest issues, policy-makers have a huge list of spending possibilities akin to a gigantic menu at a restaurant. But this menu comes without prices or serving sizes. If an international agency spends \$10m on one project instead of another, how much more good will it do? Global leaders can rarely answer that question. They need better information and so do ordinary citizens. Economics gives us the tools to look at the costs of taking effective action and measure the expected benefits. When we know the costs and benefits, it will be a lot easier to choose the best projects – the  
15 projects which do the most good with the money available.

National governments prioritize all the time. Government revenues are finite and there are many competing demands for expenditure. Responsible economic management means balancing priorities between defense, education, healthcare and welfare. This prioritization is straightforward enough in

► Problems to tackle

G&V 3, p25

► Prioritize; priorities; prioritization

G&V 2, p24

20 a democratic state: although the debate may be vigorous and high-pitched, the result is an explicitly acknowledged trade-off between different segments of society and different problem areas for a share of a finite pot of money. There is widespread recognition that governments do not have infinite resources and that they must satisfy important social needs without running unsustainable deficits.

But when we come to global welfare projects, the situation gets murky. We seem to believe that we can achieve anything, that the pool of money is infinite, and that everything should be tackled at once.

25 In effect, the majority of the big decisions are made by international agencies that receive money from rich nations and use it for the benefit of the world, especially developing countries. Each such organization has its own remit, scope of work and funding base. But most operate as independent silos. There is little incentive for cross-agency comparison. After all, there's little to be gained and much to lose if one organization's work turns out to be costlier or less effective than that of another. As a result, there are few attempts to contrast the work of, say, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) with that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and almost no overt efforts at comparing the outcomes achieved by development charities such as Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières.

30 Of course, in principle we ought to deal with all the world's woes. We should win the war against hunger, end conflicts, stop communicable diseases, provide clean drinking water, step up education and halt climate change. But we don't. We live in a world with limited resources and even more limited attention for our biggest problems.

This means we have to start asking the crucial questions: if we don't do it all, what should we do first?

Lomborg, B. (Ed.) (2007). *Solutions for the world's biggest problems: Costs and benefits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### 3 Identifying the sequence of ideas

As you read an academic text it is important to understand the sequence of ideas in order to follow the writer's argument.

3.1 Here are the main ideas in the text in 2.3. Read the text in detail and put the ideas in the order that they appear.

- a We can use economics to compare the costs and benefits of projects. \_\_\_\_\_
- b All global welfare projects should be worked on at the same time. \_\_\_\_\_
- c Both developed and developing countries still have problems. \_\_\_\_\_
- d International agencies are not motivated to compare the effectiveness of their work. \_\_\_\_\_
- e The quality of life for most people has been improving. 1
- f People understand that governments have to prioritise national spending. \_\_\_\_\_
- g We need to face the problem of how to prioritise problems. \_\_\_\_\_
- h It is difficult to compare the costs and benefits of global welfare projects. \_\_\_\_\_

### 4 Understanding implicit meanings

4.1 a Read the following extracts from the text in 2.3. Is the second sentence in each extract a reason for or a consequence of something described in the first sentence? How do you know?

- 1 After all, there's little to be gained and much to lose if one organization's work turns out to be costlier or less effective than that of another. As a result, there are few attempts to contrast the work of, say, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) with that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- 2 National governments prioritize all the time. Government revenues are finite and there are many competing demands for expenditure.

► That of

G&V 1, p24

**b** For each of the following extracts decide which of the labels in the box best describes the relationship between the second and the first sentence in each extract.

contrast    example    expansion    reason

- 1 Tremendous progress has been made in our lifetimes. People in most countries live longer, healthier lives; air and water quality in the developed world is generally getting better; and a much larger population is being adequately fed.
- 2 The minority of us lucky enough to have been born in the developed world take for granted universal education, an assured food supply and clean, piped water. Hundreds of millions of people are not so lucky.
- 3 Global leaders can rarely answer that question. They need better information ...
- 4 Of course, in principle we ought to deal with all the world's woes. We should win the war against hunger, end conflicts, stop communicable diseases ...

## 5 Inferring the meaning of words

**5.1** If you find a word in a text that you don't understand, you can use the context to help you. Look at this extract from the text in 2.3. Before you look up the word *woes* in a dictionary, follow steps 1-5.

Of course, in principle we ought to deal with all the world's woes. We should win the war against hunger, end conflicts, stop communicable diseases, provide clean drinking water, step up education and halt climate change. But we don't. We live in a world with limited resources and even more limited attention for our biggest problems.

**1** Think about the wider context of a) the text and b) the paragraph.  
e.g. *What types of things does the writer of this text say we should prioritise?*

**2** Look at some of the words that come after the word. Do these words help you understand the word you don't know?  
e.g. *Are the words hunger, conflicts and diseases positive or negative things?*

**3** Look at some of the words that come before the word you don't know. What other words are often associated with the words you find? Do these associations help you understand the word you don't know?  
e.g. *What things do we deal with? Are they positive or negative things?*

**4** Can you think of a word or phrase that seems to have a similar meaning to the word you are trying to understand?

**5** If you need to, check the meaning of the word in a dictionary. Try to write a new sentence including the word to help you remember what it means.  
e.g. *'The country's financial woes won't be solved easily.'* Can you think of another example of the world's woes?

**5.2 a** Match the words (1-3) to the synonyms (a-c) using the strategy in 5.1.

- |                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| 1 akin to (line 10)     | a spending |
| 2 expenditure (line 17) | b strong   |
| 3 vigorous (line 19)    | c similar  |

**b** Can you think of a word with a similar meaning to replace these words from the text in 2.3?  
remit (line 27)                      overt (line 32)

## 6 Vocabulary building: adjectives

- 6.1 a Complete the following sentences using an adjective from the box with a similar meaning to the word or phrase in brackets.

assured	communicable	crucial	finite	infinite
straightforward	universal	widespread		

- Governments have a \_\_\_\_\_ amount of money to spend. (limited)
- Prioritising spending is quite \_\_\_\_\_ in democracies. (simple)
- We should prevent \_\_\_\_\_ diseases. (passed from one person to another)
- We need to start asking \_\_\_\_\_ questions. (extremely important)
- In the developed world we take for granted \_\_\_\_\_ education and an \_\_\_\_\_ food supply. (for everyone; guaranteed)
- There is \_\_\_\_\_ recognition that governments do not have \_\_\_\_\_ resources. (among many people and in many places; unlimited)

## Listening and speaking

### 7 Introducing your presentation

Most students have to give presentations during their academic studies. The activities in the Listening and speaking sections will help you prepare for these.

- 7.1 You are going to listen to the beginning of two talks on choices that governments make. Listen and complete the information on slides (A and B).

Talk 1

A

Main voting systems
• proportional _____
• _____ voting
• _____-past-the-post

Talk 2

B

Main tax systems
• _____ tax
• _____ tax
• _____ tax

## 8 Clarifying key terms

- 8.1 Complete the beginning of the first talk by writing the words in brackets in the correct order. Listen to the extract again and check your answers.

1 I want to begin by talking about (by / about / want / I / to / talking / begin) the different voting systems that democracies have to choose from, and 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (focus / here / on / I'll) the three main ones. First, there's proportional representation. 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (this / when / is) the number of seats a political party wins matches the number of votes the party gets. Second, there's alternative voting. 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (this / meant / what's / that / is / by) voters rank candidates in order of preference ... Third, there's the so-called first-past-the-post system. 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (words / other / in) a candidate just has to win more votes than any of their rivals in a particular area, not a majority of the votes. Let me go on to talk about each of these in more detail, and I'll discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.