



*Seventh Edition*

# Improving Reading Skills

**CONTEMPORARY READINGS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Deanne Spears





SEVENTH EDITION

# Improving Reading Skills

**CONTEMPORARY READINGS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Deanne Spears  
*City College of San Francisco*





## For David

IMPROVING READING SKILLS, SEVENTH EDITION

Published by McGraw-Hill, a business unit of McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY, 10020. Copyright © 2013 by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Previous editions © 2010, 2004, and 2000. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written consent of the McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., including, but not limited to, in any network or other electronic storage or transmission, or broadcast for distance learning.

Some ancillaries, including electronic and print components, may not be available to customers outside the United States.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN: 978-0-07-340731-9

MHID: 0-07-340731-3

Senior Vice President, Products & Markets: *Kurt L. Strand*  
Vice President, General Manager, Products & Markets: *Michael Ryan*  
Vice President, Content Production & Technology Services: *Kimberly Meriwether David*  
Director of Developmental Services: *Lisa Pinto*  
Managing Director: *David Patterson*  
Brand Manager: *Kelly Villella*  
Development Editor: *Penina Braffman*  
Director, Content Production: *Terri Schiesl*  
Senior Project Manager: *Joyce Watters*  
Buyer: *Sandy Ludovissy*  
Media Project Manager: *Sridevi Palani*  
Cover Designer: *Studio Montage, St. Louis, MO*  
Cover Image: *Yellowdog Productions/Lifesize/Getty Images*  
Typeface: *10/12 Palatino*  
Compositor: *Lachina Publishing Services*  
Printer: *R.R. Donnelley*

All credits appearing on page or at the end of book are considered to be an extension of the copyright page

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Milan Spears, Deanne.

Improving reading skills : contemporary readings for college students / Deanne Spears. — 7th ed.  
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-07-340731-9 (acid-free paper)

1. Reading (Higher education) 2. College readers. 3. Vocabulary. I. Title.

LB2395.3.M56 2012

428.4071'1—dc23

2012030245

---



## About the Author

Deanne Spears is originally from Portland, Oregon, but she now considers herself a native Californian, having moved to Los Angeles when there were still orange groves in the area and only a couple of freeways. After receiving a B.A. and an M.A. in comparative literature from the University of Southern California, she began teaching composition and reading at City College of San Francisco. She continues to tutor students in reading and composition and to conduct teacher-preparation workshops for the college. She is married to fellow English teacher and jazz musician, David Spears. In addition to her primary interests—reading and studying Italian—she and David enjoy cooking, watching movies (they have over 100 titles in their Netflix queue), kayaking and camping (especially in the Gold Lakes Basin area of Northern California), walking their Queensland heeler, Katie, on the bluffs around Half Moon Bay, and discovering new and inexpensive ethnic restaurants. Deanne is the author of *Developing Critical Reading Skills*, (9<sup>th</sup> edition, 2013) and, with David, *In Tandem* (1st edition, 2008).

# Contents

**Preface** xvi

**To the Student** xx

**Improving Your Vocabulary** 1

Five Techniques for Acquiring Words 2

Using Context Clues 7

Using the Dictionary 13

**DAVE BARRY**

**Tips for Women: How to Have a Relationship with a Guy** 21

*We're not talking about different wavelengths here. We're talking about different planets, in completely different solar systems. Elaine cannot communicate meaningfully with Roger about their relationship any more than she can meaningfully play chess with a duck. Because the sum total of Roger's thinking on this particular topic is as follows: Huh?*

**Exercises** 25

**Comprehension Worksheet** 30

**PRACTICE  
SELECTION**

**PART ONE**

**Getting Started: Practicing the Basics** 31

Identifying the Main Idea and Writer's Purpose 32

The Varieties of Reading You Will Do in This Book 32

Identifying the Main Idea in Short Passages 33

Implied Main Ideas 39

Thesis Statements in Articles and Essays 40

Identifying the Writer's Purpose 42

**1** **DAVID SEDARIS**  
**Hejira** 43

*It wasn't anything I had planned on, but at the age of twenty-two, after dropping out of my second college and traveling across the country a few times, I found myself back in Raleigh,*

*living in my parents' basement. After six months spent waking at noon, getting high, and listening to the same Joni Mitchell record over and over again, I was called by my father into his den and told to get out.*

## **2** SHERMAN ALEXIE **Superman and Me 49**

*A smart Indian is a dangerous person, widely feared and ridiculed by Indians and non-Indians alike. I fought with my classmates on a daily basis. They wanted me to stay quiet when the non-Indian teacher asked for answers, for volunteers, for help. We were Indian children who were expected to be stupid. Most lived up to those expectations inside the classroom but subverted them on the outside.*

## **3** JOE ABBOTT **To Kill a Hawk 57**

*It was the summer of 1971, and a dozen friends and I had driven down the breathtakingly steep and tortuous road into Shelter Cove in southern Humboldt County to camp on the black sand beaches. We were pretty young then, and ill-prepared, and we quickly gobbled down our meager food supplies. So I and a couple others went down into the cove to poach abalones among the rocks.*

## **4** ROSE GUILBAULT **School Days 64**

*"What is that?" Mona scrunched her nose at my doll. "Don't you have a Barbie?" The other girls twittered. What was a Barbie? I wondered. And why was my doll looked down on? I felt embarrassed and quickly stuffed my unworthy toy back into the paper bag. I would not be invited to play with them again.*

## **5** COLBY BUZZELL **Johnny Get Your Textbook 73**

*The first day on campus brought back flashbacks. Not of the war, but of high school and my first day of basic training when I was absolutely convinced that I had made the biggest mistake of my life. I found myself spending the majority of my free time asking god please; "Turn me into a bird so I can fly far, far away."*

## **6** JOHN BUSSEY **Old Hat for the New Normal 81**

*"Dad," I teased, "a box of fresh donuts for just \$2.50! How can you pass up a deal like that?" "That's nothing," he said. "Wait until tomorrow when they're a day old, they'll be a buck and a quarter."*

## PART TWO Refining the Basics 89

Annotating, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing 90

Annotating 90

Paraphrasing 93

Summarizing 96

## 7 CAROLINE HWANG

**The Good Daughter 101**

*My parents didn't want their daughter to be Korean, but they don't want her fully American, either. Children of immigrants are living paradoxes.*

## 8 STUDS TERKEL

**Somebody Built the Pyramids 109**

*Mike Fitzgerald . . . is a laborer in a steel mill. "I feel like the guys who built the pyramids. Somebody built 'em. Somebody built the Empire State Building, too. There's hard work behind it. I would like to see a building, say The Empire State, with a foot-wide strip from top to bottom and the name of every bricklayer on it, the name of every electrician. So when a guy walked by, he could take his son and say, 'See, that's me over there on the 45<sup>th</sup> floor. I put that steel beam in.'"*

## 9 SHERRY TURKLE

**The Nostalgia of the Young 118**

*One high school senior recalls a time when his father used to sit next to him on the couch, reading. "He read for pleasure and didn't mind being interrupted." But when his father, a doctor, switched from books to his BlackBerry, things became less clear. "He could be playing a game or looking at a patient record, and you would never know . . . He is in that same BlackBerry zone."*

## 10 ELIZABETH BERNSTEIN

**How Facebook Ruins Friendships 129**

*Notice to my friends. I love you all dearly.*

*But I don't give a hoot that you are "having a busy Monday," your child "took 30 minutes to brush his teeth," your dog "just ate an ant trap" or you want to "save the piglets." And I really, really don't care which Addams Family member you most resemble.*

## 11 CHRIS ROSE

**Hell and Back 136**

*For all of my adult life, I regarded depression and anxiety as pretty much a load of hooey. I never accorded any credibility to the idea that they are medical conditions. Nothing scientific about it. You get sick, get fired, fall in love, get laid, buy a new pair of shoes, join a gym, get religion, seasons change, whatever; you go with the flow, dust yourself off, get back in the game. I thought antidepressants were for desperate housewives and fragile poets.*

## 12 VIRGINIA MORELL Minds of Their Own 149

*Many of Alex's cognitive skills, such as his ability to understand the concepts of same and different, are generally ascribed only to higher mammals, particularly primates. But parrots, like great apes (and humans), live a long time in complex societies. And like primates, these birds must keep track of the dynamics of changing relationships and environments.*

## 13 OLIVIA WU Alfresco Marriage Market 165

*Sitting on a bench with his sign resting on his half-bared chest, shirt unbuttoned in the sweltering heat, he says the son he is trying to marry off is his last—"1976, Year of the Dragon, 1.74 meters, a computer engineer, 3,000 RMB (\$375 monthly salary), seeking a female 2 to 3 years younger with an associate degree."*

### PART THREE Tackling More Challenging Prose 175

Making Inferences 176

## 14 CARLA RIVERA From Illiterate to Role Model 185

*Even now, [Eileen, his wife] said, it's hard for her to believe his reading ability was so limited. "He just seemed to do fine," she said. "He learned to compensate. If we went to a restaurant, he [already] knew what to order off a menu or he could tell by the pictures. When he couldn't, he would just order a hamburger."*

## 15 JOHN SCHWARTZ Extreme Makeover: Criminal Court Edition 196

*When John Ditullio goes on trial on Monday, jurors will not see the large swastika tattooed on his neck. Or the crude insult tattooed on the other side of his neck. Or any of the other markings he has acquired since being jailed on charges related to a double stabbing that wounded a woman and killed a teenager in 2006.*

## 16 "THE WAITER" (STEVE DUBLANICA) Why Be a Waiter? 204

*Quite a few waiters have lives that are train wrecks. A famous chef once observed that the restaurant business is a haven for people who don't fit in anywhere else. That's true. The restaurant business can be like the French Foreign Legion—without the heavy weaponry.*

## 17 STEVE STRIFFLER Undercover in a Chicken Factory 219

*I learn quickly that "unskilled" labor requires immense skill. The job of harinero is extremely complicated. In a simple sense the harinero empties 50-pound bags of flour all day.*

*The work is backbreaking, but it takes less physical dexterity than many other jobs on the line. At the same time, the job is multifaceted and cannot be quickly learned. The harinero adjusts the breeder and rebreeder, monitors the marinade, turns the power on and off, and replaces old flour with fresh flour. All this would be relatively manageable if the lines ran well. They never do.*

## 18 MARTIN LINDSTROM Selling Illusions of Cleanliness 233

*Knowing that even the suggestion of fruit evokes powerful associations of health, freshness and cleanliness, brands across all categories have gone fruity on us, infusing everything from shampoos to bottled waters with pineapple, oranges, peaches, passion fruit and banana fragrances—engineered in a chemist’s laboratory, of course.*

## 19 LAURENCE SHAMES The Hunger for More 241

*Americans have always been optimists, and optimists have always liked to speculate. In Texas in the 1880s, the speculative instrument of choice was towns, and there is no tale more American than this. What people would do was buy up enormous tracts of parched and vacant land, lay out a Main Street, nail together some wooden sidewalks, and start slapping up buildings. . . . The developers would erect a flagpole and name a church, and once the workmen had packed up and moved on, the town would be as empty as the sky.*

## 20 VAL PLUMWOOD Being Prey: Surviving a Crocodile Attack 251

*When the whirling terror stopped again I surfaced again, still in the crocodile’s grip next to a stout branch of a large sandpaper fig growing in the water. I grabbed the branch, vowing to let the crocodile tear me apart rather than throw me again into that spinning, suffocating hell. For the first time I realized that the crocodile was growling, as if angry.*

## PART FOUR Mastering Reading about Complex Ideas 265

Patterns of Development 266

List of Facts or Details 267

Examples 267

Reasons—Cause and Effect 268

Description of a Process 269

Contrast 270

Transitional Elements 274

Transitions that Indicate Additional Information Is Coming 275

Transitions that Introduce Examples or Illustrations 275

Transitions that Show Cause-Effect Connections 276

Transitions that Show Chronological Order or Time Progression 277

Transitions that Show Contrast 277

Some Final Considerations 279

## 21 DEBRA J. DICKERSON

### Raising Cain 281

*When I was pregnant with my first child, who is now 5, I was ecstatic to learn he was a boy. This was odd, since I did not much like those of the male gender. Little boys even less, because I'd seen the center-of-the-universe process by which they become men.*

## 22 TAMARA LUSH

### Living Inside a Virtual World 292

*In 2007, Van Cleave had three different World of Warcraft accounts (each at a cost of \$14.95 a month). A secret Paypal account paid for two of the accounts so his wife wouldn't hound him about the cost. He spent \$224 in real money to buy fake gold, so he could get an in-game "epic-level sword" and some "top-tier armor" for his avatar. Changes in Van Cleave's personality began to appear.*

## 23 DAN ARIELY

### The Problem of Procrastination and Self-Control 302

*As a university professor, I'm all too familiar with procrastination. At the beginning of every semester my students make heroic promises to themselves—vowing to read their assignments on time, submit their papers on time, and in general, stay on top of things. And every semester I've watched as temptation takes them out on a date, over to the student union for a meeting, and off on a ski trip in the mountains—while their workload falls farther and farther behind. In the end, they wind up impressing me, not with their punctuality, but with their creativity—inventing stories, excuses, and family tragedies to explain their tardiness.*

## 24 CARLIN FLORA

### Hello, My Name Is Unique 311

*Increasingly, children are also named for prized possessions. In 2000, birth certificates revealed that there were 298 Armanis, 269 Chanels, 49 Canons, 6 Timberlands, 5 Jaguars and 353 girls named Lexus in the U.S.*

## 25 MARC IAN BARASCH

### The Bystander's Dilemma: Why Do We Walk on By? 323

*My panhandling skills are nil. Each rejection feels like a body blow. I can see the little comic-strip thought balloon spring from people's brows—Get a job! I work!*

## 26 STEPHANIE BANCHERO AND STEPHANIE SIMON

### My Teacher Is an App 336

*Noah and Allison Schnacky, aspiring actors who travel frequently, initially chose Florida Virtual for its flexibility. Noah says that he likes expressing his thoughts at the keyboard, alone in his room, instead of in a crowded class. But there are downsides. After falling behind in algebra, he tried to set up a 15-minute call with his teacher. She was booked solid—for a month.*

## 27 JARED DIAMOND

### Easter's End 348

*As we try to imagine the decline of Easter [Island's] civilization, we ask ourselves, "Why didn't they look around, realize what they were doing, and stop before it was too late? What were they thinking when they cut down the last palm tree?"*

## PART FIVE Reading about Issues 363

Persuasive Writing and Opinion Pieces 364

The Principles of Persuasive Writing 364

The Aims of Persuasive Writing 364

How to Read Persuasive Writing 365

Types of Claims 366

Kinds of Evidence 367

The Refutation 368

The Structure of an Argument 369

Bias 370

## A PRACTICE EDITORIAL ELIZABETH ROYTE

### A Fountain on Every Corner, *The New York Times* 370

*An entire generation of Americans has grown up thinking public faucets equal filth, and the only water fit to drink comes in plastic, factory-sealed. It's time to change that perception . . .*

## 28 JOHN STOSSEL

### The College Scam, [www.RealClearPolitics.com](http://www.RealClearPolitics.com) 374

*What do Michael Dell, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates and Mark Cuban have in common? They're all college dropouts. Richard Branson, Simon Cowell and Peter Jennings have in common? They never went to college at all.*

## 29 JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

### The Seat Not Taken, *The New York Times* 380

*I'm a man of color, one of the few on the train and often the only one in the quiet car, and I've concluded that color explains a lot about my experience. Unless the car is nearly full, color will determine, even if it doesn't exactly clarify, why 9 times out of 10 people will shun a free seat if it means sitting next to me.*

## 30 ANDY BROOKS AND STEVE WEBER

### Disarming the Hooligans Among Us, *San Francisco Chronicle* 385

*This new virtual stadium certainly can be a nasty place. It's no holds barred on some teams' Facebook pages, and you don't have to look hard to find videos of fan-on-fan violence on YouTube.*

## 31 DAVID BROOKS If It Feels Right. . . , *The New York Times* 390

*When asked to describe a moral dilemma they had faced, two-thirds of the young people either couldn't answer the question or described problems that are not moral at all, like whether they could afford to rent a certain apartment or whether they had enough quarters to feed the meter at a parking spot.*

## 32 COURTNEY E. MARTIN Is the American Dream a Delusion?, [www.AlterNet.org](http://www.AlterNet.org) 395

*You know the story: Once upon a time there was a hardworking, courageous young man, born in a poor family, who came to America, put in blood, sweat and tears, and eventually found riches and respect. But knowing the statistics on social mobility and the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, I just can't stomach this "happily ever after" scenario. It is too clean. Real life is full of messy things like racism and the wage gap and child care and nepotism.*

## 33 PETER TURNLEY The Line—Photographs from the U.S.–Mexican Border 401

### PART SIX Reading Short Fiction 405

## 34 J. ROBERT LENNON Town Life 407

*A small town not far from here gained some small notoriety when a famous movie actress, fed up with the misanthropy and greed of Hollywood, moved there with her husband, children, and many dogs and horses.*

## 35 YIYUN LI Souvenir 409

*The girl looked at the old man, unconvinced by his widower's sorrow. This was not the first time she had been approached this way, older men claiming that she reminded them of their dead wives and first loves.*

## 36 GUY DE MAUPASSANT The Necklace 414

*She was one of those pretty and charming girls who, as if through some blunder of fate, are born into a family of pen pushers.*

## 37 JACK LONDON To Build a Fire 421

*Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as*

*a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe.*

**PART SEVEN** **Everyday Reading** 435

- Reading Newspaper and Magazine Articles (Print or Online) 436
  - David Brown, Test Rat a Good Samaritan, *The Washington Post* 437
  - Lisa M. Krieger, Uncovering Glimpse of Young Universe, *San Jose Mercury News* 439
  - "Comfort Food on the Brain," *Utne Reader* 442
- Reading a Credit Card Insert 444
  - Chase Sapphire Visa Credit Card—Identity Theft Protection 445
- Reading and Comparing Package Labels 448
  - Kraft Macaroni and Cheese vs. Annie's Macaroni and Cheese 449
- Reading Recipes 452
  - Two Macaroni and Cheese Recipes 453
- Reading Blogs 456
- Reading Graphic Material—Pie Charts, Bar Graphs, and Line Graphs 456
- E-Readers—An Overview 459

**Index** I-1

**Index of Vocabulary Preview Words** I-4

# Alternate Contents

## Arranged by Theme

### COMING OF AGE, INITIATION RITES, AND GENDER ROLES

- Practice Selection:** **Dave Barry**, “Tips for Women: How to Have a Relationship with a Guy” 20
- 1 David Sedaris**, “Hejira” 43
  - 3 Joe Abbott**, “To Kill a Hawk” 57
  - 4 Rose Guilbault**, “School Days” 64
  - 21 Debra J. Dickerson**, “Raising Cain” 281

### TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Practice Selection:** **Dave Barry**, “Tips for Women: How to Have a Relationship with a Guy” 21
- 9 Sherry Turkle**, “The Nostalgia of the Young” 118
  - 10 Elizabeth Bernstein**, “How Facebook Ruins Friendships” 129
  - 22 Tamara Lush**, “Living Inside a Virtual World” 292
  - 26 Stephanie Banchemo and Stephanie Simon**, “My Teacher Is an App” 336

### LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND EDUCATION

- 2 Sherman Alexie**, “Superman and Me” 49
- 5 Colby Buzzell**, “Johnny Get Your Textbook” 73
- 12 Virginia Morell**, “Minds of Their Own” 149
- 14 Carla Rivera**, “From Illiterate to Role Model” 185
- 26 Stephanie Banchemo and Stephanie Simon**, “My Teacher Is an App” 336
- 28 John Stossel**, “The College Scam” 374

### OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL SELVES

- 5 Colby Buzzell**, “Johnny Get Your Textbook” 73
- 11 Chris Rose**, “Hell and Back” 136
- 15 John Schwartz**, “Extreme Makeover: Criminal Court Edition” 196

- 23 **Dan Ariely**, “The Problem of Procrastination and Self-Control” 302
- 25 **Mark Ian Barasch**, “The Bystander’s Dilemma: Why Do We Walk on By?” 323
- 30 **Andy Brooks and Steve Weber**, “Disarming the Hooligans Among Us” 385

## RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

- 2 **Sherman Alexie**, “Superman and Me” 49
- 7 **Caroline Hwang**, “The Good Daughter” 101
- 13 **Olivia Wu**, “Alfresco Marriage Market” 165
- 21 **Debra J. Dickerson**, “Raising Cain” 281
- 29 **John Edgar Wideman**, “The Seat Not Taken” 380
- 33 **Peter Turnley**, “The Line—Photographs from the U.S.–Mexican Border” 401

## THE WORLD OF WORK

- 8 **Studs Terkel**, “Somebody Built the Pyramids” 109
- 16 **“The Waiter” (Steve Dublanica)**, “Why Be a Waiter?” 204
- 17 **Steve Striffler**, “Undercover in a Chicken Factory” 219

## CONSUMERISM, AMERICAN STYLE

- 6 **John Bussey**, “Old Hat for the New Normal” 81
- 18 **Martin Lindstrom**, “Selling Illusions of Cleanliness” 233
- 19 **Laurence Shames**, “The Hunger for More” 241

## SCIENCE, NATURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

- 9 **Sherry Turkle**, “The Nostalgia of the Young” 118
- 10 **Elizabeth Bernstein**, “How Facebook Ruins Friendships” 129
- 12 **Virginia Morell**, “Minds of Their Own” 149
- 20 **Val Plumwood**, “Being Prey: Surviving a Crocodile Attack” 251
- 22 **Tamara Lush**, “Living Inside a Virtual World” 292
- 26 **Stephanie Banchemo and Stephanie Simon**, “My Teacher Is an App” 336
- 27 **Jared Diamond**, “Easter’s End” 348
- Practice Editorial:* **Elizabeth Royte**, “A Fountain on Every Corner” 370

**TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIFE**

- 6 John Bussey**, “Old Hat for the New Normal” 81
- 9 Sherry Turkle**, “The Nostalgia of the Young” 118
- 10 Elizabeth Bernstein**, “How Facebook Ruins Friendships” 129
- 15 John Schwartz**, “Extreme Makeover: Criminal Court Edition” 196
- 18 Martin Lindstrom**, “Selling Illusions of Cleanliness” 233
- 24 Carlin Flora**, “Hello, My Name Is Unique” 311
- 29 John Edgar Wideman**, “The Seat Not Taken” 380
- 30 Andy Brooks and Steve Weber**, “Disarming the Hooligans Among Us” 385
- 31 David Brooks**, “If It Feels Right . . . “ 390
- 32 Courtney E. Martin**, “Is the American Dream a Delusion?” 395



# Preface

Past users of *Improving Reading Skills* will find many changes in the seventh edition, which I elaborate on a bit later. The book's rationale, however, remains the same: Students improve their reading by reading, rather than by reading about techniques and strategies, just as one becomes a better driver by driving a lot or learns to make a good omelet by making dozens of omelets. Like the preceding six editions, the seventh edition tries to give students insightful, engaging, contemporary selections that challenge them and make them want to turn the page. The book's subtitle, *Contemporary Readings for College Students*, reflects this emphasis. In addition to acquiring skills, students will learn something about the world as they read.

In response to several reviewers' suggestions, in this edition I have incorporated more readings that students will find relevant to their lives, including the following: A blog posting by an Iraq War veteran who describes what it's like to return to the college classroom (Colby Buzzell); the psychological effects of the excessive use of cell phones, Facebook, and World of Warcraft (Sherry Turkle, Elizabeth Bernstein, and Tamara Lush); a unique way of finding marriage partners in China (Olivia Wu); an examination of whether online education is appropriate for K–12 students (Stephanie Banchero and Stephanie Simon); and finally, various commentaries on materialism and consumerism (John Bussey, Martin Lindstrom, Laurence Shames, and Guy de Maupassant).

More traditional analytical readings are here, as well, to get students' reading skills up to college level, some reprinted from earlier editions, many new. Among them are two pieces about learning to read: Sherman Alexie, "Superman and Me," and Carla Rivera, "From Illiterate to Role Model." Three selections are about the world of work: Studs Terkel, "Somebody Built the Pyramids"; an excerpt from a blog written by "The Waiter," pseudonym of Steve Dublanica, "Why Be a Waiter?"; and Steve Striffler, "Undercover in a Chicken Factory."

Other topics include psychological and social behavior: Chris Rose's battle with depression after Hurricane Katrina; Americans' preoccupation with hygiene (Martin Lindstrom); an experiment with college students about the problem of procrastination (Dan Ariely); and finally, Marc Ian Barasch's examination of empathy concerning the homeless. Human interest and adventure selections are included as well, represented by Dave Barry, David Sedaris, Joe Abbott, Caroline Hwang, Val Plumwood, and Debra J. Dickerson.

The readings are accompanied by a variety of practice exercises to reinforce good reading skills and to help students develop a college-level vocabulary. This

basic principle—high-interest contemporary readings and useful exercises—has accounted for the book’s success in the past and remains the guiding principle for this edition. A brief discussion of the book’s important components follow. Former users of the text will see that most of these components remain the same, while new ones have been incorporated, which I hope will make the book more enjoyable and helpful.

## An Overview of the Text

The seventh edition contains 41 reading selections—book, magazine, and newspaper articles and essays, online and newspaper editorials, two short textbook excerpts, and new to this edition, short fiction and everyday reading material (explained in detail further on). For Parts One through Six, I chose the readings using several criteria: They must be well written and relatively easy to understand (especially in the beginning readings); they must be a reasonable length so that students can complete the reading and accompanying exercises in one sitting; and they must be of sufficient interest to appeal to the most reluctant of readers.

I want students to see that they are members of a larger community and that reading can be instrumental in helping them fill this role. Reading also provides students with a way for them to understand the world around them and to search for meaning in their own lives. The book seeks to help students improve their reading comprehension and to read with better concentration, enjoyment, and confidence.

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

As in the preceding six editions, the seventh edition continues to stress vocabulary development in the context of each reading. In my experience both teaching and tutoring reading at City College of San Francisco, a weak vocabulary—perhaps even more than poor concentration or lack of interest—is a major stumbling block for our students. Because the interrelationship between comprehension and vocabulary is so strong, intensive emphasis on vocabulary was an immediate concern when I prepared the first edition. My current tutoring job on campus and the workshops I teach for prospective teachers have only strengthened this conviction. Thus, vocabulary remains an integral part of the text.

To this end, a section titled “Vocabulary Analysis” precedes each selection (Parts One through Five). Each preview introduces students to one or two words that they will encounter in the reading. Typically divided into Word Parts and Word Families, these introductory sections introduce the reader to prefixes, roots, and suffixes, and illustrate a systematic way to analyze and to acquire new words. This vocabulary is taught in the context of the reading and should be useful both for English speakers and for English-language learners alike.

Finally, Parts One through Five include two vocabulary exercises, the forms of which vary from selection to selection, as a glance through the text will show. My aim is to make the vocabulary exercises more challenging and engaging than merely multiple-choice questions. Many exercises ask students to locate a word

in the paragraph that matches a given definition. Others ask them to show their mastery of the meanings of several words by inserting them into a paragraph correctly; still others ask students to provide variant forms of some of the selection's most important words.

## READING SKILLS AND THE EXERCISE MATERIAL

Each section of the book begins with an overview and explanation of various skills necessary for good reading comprehension and analysis. These topics are arranged so that students encounter the most fundamental skills at the beginning of the course before progressing to the next level. The introductions contain short examples and excerpts to familiarize students with these skills. In response to reviewers' suggestions, I have expanded these introductory sections for the most part, giving students an opportunity to practice with short exercise material.

The exercises in the seventh edition are extensive and cover a wider range of skills than those in most other college reading texts. Step by step, each exercise provides students an opportunity to practice these skills at a level appropriate for each reading. Instructors should feel free to choose exercises from among those offered and not feel compelled to assign them all. By the end of the course, these exercises will have helped to improve students' comprehension and analytical skills. In addition to the aforementioned vocabulary exercises, after each selection students are given intensive practice in the following skills: comprehending main ideas, identifying the writer's purpose, annotating and paraphrasing, sequencing (rearranging scrambled sentences to form a logical passage), locating information, distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, making inferences and drawing conclusions, and distinguishing between fact and opinion. Emphasis on summary writing, paraphrasing, and annotating occurs throughout the text as well.

## WEBSITE MATERIAL—HELP FOR INSTRUCTORS

To help in course planning, instructors will find a great deal of help on the website accompanying the book. For each selection, they will find a brief summary, some suggestions for teaching the reading selection, information about word lengths, grade levels, readability scores, and where relevant, answers to exercises (Parts One through Five and Part Seven). The address is [www.mhhe.com/spears](http://www.mhhe.com/spears). Click on the cover of the book to access the Instructor's Manual.

## Changes in the Seventh Edition

The most significant change is the inclusion of Parts Six and Seven—Reading Short Fiction and Everyday Reading—which give students an opportunity to read short stories for pleasure and to develop techniques for reading material outside the usual classroom experience. This latter section includes suggestions for reading newspaper articles, blogs, credit card inserts, recipes, labels on processed food packages, graphic material, and a discussion of e-readers. Brief exercises are included for most of these.

I have incorporated almost without exception the many excellent suggestions made by the reviewers of the previous edition. Here are the most significant changes in the seventh edition:

- Expanded Part Introductions that now precede each of the book's first five parts, including more short exercises.
- More easy, short readings, especially in Parts One and Two, and a balance between multiple-choice and fill-in answers. Many selections are between 600 and 1,000 words long.
- Where appropriate, for several readings students will find a group activity to define slang and idiomatic expressions, particularly helpful for English-language learners.
- Increased emphasis on annotating, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
- In Part Five, Reading About Issues, I have included a section called What More Do I Need to Know? giving students a chance to ask questions about the reading that go beyond the reading. The point here is that being educated doesn't mean having knowledge about a subject; it also means knowing what questions to ask.
- Each selection ends with Explore the Web, giving students a task to perform or a topic to explore in more depth that relates to the reading.
- The inclusion of short fiction and practical reading material.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all of the reviewers of the sixth edition, who offered many fine suggestions about how to improve the book, and I am grateful for their help. If this edition is better than previous ones, it is because of them:

Karin Alderfer, Miami Dade College  
 Jehane Brown, Santa Barbara City College  
 Marie Eckstrom, Rio Hondo College  
 Mary Ann Weyandt, Alan Hancock College  
 Janice Wiggins-Clarke, Passaic County Community College

I must also thank Steven Penzinger, formerly of Random House, who believed in my original proposal enough to take a chance on publishing the first edition. Janice Wiggins-Clarke, my developmental editor, supervised the revision process and handled innumerable details efficiently and with good humor. Wes Hall cleared the permissions and solved a number of thorny issues surrounding their clearance. Thanks also to Joyce Watters, Project Manager, and Allison Morgan and Chris Black at Lachina Publishing Services, who efficiently handled the book's production. To all of them, I am most grateful.

Instructors should feel free to send suggestions, comments, or questions via e-mail to me at [dkspears@gmail.com](mailto:dkspears@gmail.com). I can also be reached through the McGraw-Hill Higher Education website at <http://www.mhhe.com/spears>. I will do my best to answer all correspondence within a day or two.

Deanne Spears  
 Half Moon Bay, California



# To the Student

## The Aims of the Text

This is the seventh edition of *Improving Reading Skills*. Because the book has evolved in many ways—both large and small—since the first edition, you will benefit from the many changes it has undergone. If you work through the readings diligently and attentively, with your instructor's help you will achieve several goals: better concentration, improved reading comprehension, an advanced level of vocabulary, a knowledge of major word elements, and most important, a way to tie the content of the readings to the outside world. Finally, you can pursue subjects that particularly interest you by accessing relevant websites.

Your instructor and I hope that you will derive the ultimate benefit from the instruction provided in the text: an enjoyment of reading that becomes a life-long pursuit. Reading well allows you to travel from the comfort of your home, to dream, to escape, to learn, to understand the important issues of the day, to question, and—most crucially as a student and citizen—to think.

The selections in this edition are drawn from books, magazines, newspapers, online sources, blogs, and college textbooks. Parts One through Five and Part Seven represent nonfiction, the kind of reading required in your other college courses (in particular, English courses), and reading material you will encounter the rest of your life. I have tried to choose high-interest readings reflecting a variety of topics and writing styles. Some are entertaining, some are informative, some are provocative. Most will give you something to think about—and to write about. The selections are arranged in order of difficulty, which means that as you work through them, you will be able to refine your comprehension, vocabulary, and analytical skills with increasingly more challenging material.

New to the seventh edition is Reading Short Fiction (Part Six) and Everyday Reading (Part Seven); the latter shows you how to tackle such mundane reading tasks as contracts, graphic material, recipes, and blogs, along with some thoughts about e-readers.

## The Structure of the Text

The book is divided into seven parts. Each part begins with instruction in a particular reading skill. Since the material moves from simple to moderate to more difficult, the introductions conform to that system so that the most important

skills are taken up first; each provides you with an opportunity to practice the skills with short excerpts before going on to the longer readings. It is worth taking a few minutes to look over the table of contents to see the overall organization of the contents. And even if your instructor doesn't assign it, be sure to read and to work through the exercises accompanying the Practice Selection in Part One by Dave Barry, which will familiarize you with the exercise material throughout the text.

### **POST-READING EXERCISES**

The exercise material following each reading will help you to practice a variety of important reading skills. Taken together, they will show you how to read systematically and will provide a structure and direction for your reading. Some of the exercises are multiple-choice, while others require you to formulate answers in your own words. Although the types of exercises vary from selection to selection, each skill is reinforced throughout the text as the material becomes more difficult. Further, these exercises break the process of comprehension and analysis down into small, separate steps, so that little by little, you will understand better what to look for when you read, whether you are reading for an academic course or for pleasure. A side benefit is that you should find it easier to concentrate and to focus as you read.

The questions for writing or discussion ask you to respond to reading in a short essay or to consider an important question that the selection raises. You should look over these two sections even if your instructor does not assign them, since they might provide inspiration for essays that you have to write in other courses.

### **THE SKILLS YOU WILL LEARN**

The skills that, apart from vocabulary, you will work on during the term include understanding the main idea, identifying the writer's purpose, distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, making accurate inferences and conclusions, learning to annotate, paraphrasing and summarizing, distinguishing between fact and opinion, analyzing structure, patterns of development and placement of transitions, and identifying the claim and the evidence in editorial (persuasive) writing.

### **EXPLORING ON YOUR OWN—EXPLORE THE WEB**

Opportunities to search the Web on topics relevant to the selections' themes are integrated throughout the text in the many sections called Explore the Web. In some instances, I provide websites for you to explore; in other instances, I suggest how to conduct a search of a particular topic, using Google or your favorite search engine. I point you in some direction so that if you are particularly intrigued by a selection and want to read more, you can find a starting place. Many of the recommended sites include links to related sites.

---

sample content of Improving Reading Skills

- [download online Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays \(FSG Classics\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [read Country Wives \(Barleybridge, Book 2\)](#)
- [Medical Microbiology: The Big Picture \(LANGE The Big Picture\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [click ServiceStack 4 Cookbook](#)
  
- <http://www.khoi.dk/?books/Flirting-with-Fire--Hot-in-Chicacgo--Book-1-.pdf>
- <http://www.satilik-kopek.com/library/Economic-and-Philosophic-Manuscripts-of-1844.pdf>
- <http://serazard.com/lib/The-Ruins-of-Gorlan--Ranger-s-Apprentice--Book-1-.pdf>
- <http://drmurphreesnewsletters.com/library/Dragons-of-the-Hourglass-Mage--The-Lost-Chronicles--Book-3-.pdf>
- <http://metromekanik.com/ebooks/Galactica-Discovers-Earth--Battlestar-Galactica--Book-5-.pdf>