

GSSR (Guided Self-Selected Reading)

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Hello everybody. I'm Steve Krashen and I'm speaking to you from Santa Monica, California.

I'm not home. I'm in my granddaughter's room. She is the technical director for my youtube posts.

Hello to my colleagues at the IranZamin language school in Zanjan, Iran. A pleasure to talk with you today.

My topic is Guided Self-Selected Reading.

GSSR is a term that was introduced by Beniko Mason [[website](#)] [[and, for example](#)], and it stands for *Guided Self-Selected Reading*. I think it is one of the most useful ideas that we've ever had introduced into our profession. It fills a serious gap: *How do you get from the basic levels of reading to the point where you can read authentic literature on your own: books that are written by native speakers and for native speakers.*

What I'm going to present to you is based on theory, and a lot of research. Otherwise I wouldn't be talking about it.

The basis for all this is what we call *Optimal Input*, an idea I wrote about years ago, in 1982 in my book *Principles and Practice*. Beniko Mason re-read what I wrote and improved on it. I presented it in a [recent paper](#), and in a [recent YouTube presentation](#).

It is very simple: Optimal Input is input that is:

- comprehensible

- extremely interesting
- is very rich in language; and,
- there's a lot of it—it's abundant.
- It's done in a low-anxiety environment:
 - No comprehension questions
 - No demands for premature output
 (Low affective filter.)

Pleasure reading meets these requirements, and studies show that it results in very good gains in grammar, vocabulary, what we call knowledge of text structure: that is, a feeling for good writing, and even oral ability, listening and speaking. So this is a sure winner.

Beniko Mason included GSSR in her program in Japan as an introduction, kind of a lead-in to pleasure reading. It is done after students have built up some competence through listening to stories, and before they are able to freely select their own reading.

In guided self-selected reading, readers read a lot of very easy but interesting texts.

I'm going to say it again because that's the whole thing right there. Guided Self-Selected Reading: You read a whole lot, *really a lot*, of very easy but interesting texts. It is a remarkable idea that we simply haven't taken seriously. We've tried everything else.

It's *guided*, because teachers *guide* students to reading that's right for them. To do this, teachers have to know their students, and they have to know the students' interests, as well as be knowledgeable about what graded readers are like.

To help teachers do this, students make a brief simple entry in their reading notebook after each book they read. It takes five minutes. Students write a short summary of the book and some reflections in their first language. They also include the title, number of pages read, and any questions they might have about their reading experience, or about the book.

Again, Guided Self-Selected reading requires a large amount of reading material be available. In Beniko Mason's program, when she was at the university [Shitennoji University Junior College in Osaka, Japan], 500 students had access to

over 5,000 graded readers in English. Isn't that wonderful? That's what we're talking about. That's what we need.

Teachers also have to encourage reading, and allow time for competence to develop. Beniko Mason's studies show that for mature students, it takes at least four semesters of pleasure reading until students are ready to read authentic texts; that is, texts written by native speakers for native speakers. And not all are going to be ready in four semesters.

That is, four-plus semesters of reading with pleasure and with comfort. Traditional teaching does exactly the opposite. In the beginning—Do you remember your basic foreign language class?—you read very short texts that were designed to help you practice certain target grammar rules and target vocabulary, and after that you jumped to very, very challenging texts, sometimes classics or serious papers in magazines and newspapers, etc..

In GSSR there is no target vocabulary or grammar. Readers absorb all that ("acquire") while they read. Research supporting Guided Self-Selected reading goes back more than 20 years to [our first paper](#) in 1997.

The most recent study [[Mason & Krashen 2017](#)] looked at guided self-selected reading of students studying English as a Foreign Language who had experience in Story-Listening. They spend time periods ranging from 22 weeks to about three years, 162 weeks, doing GSSR. The readers averaged well over a half a point gain on a standardized test, the TOEIC, for each hour of reading.

This predicts that if students read two hours a day for two years (about 600 hours), they would gain 300 points on the TOEIC, just sitting down relaxing and reading interesting books. In a couple of years they would move from low levels to high levels on test like the TOEIC, e.g. from "elementary proficiency" to "working proficiency."

Right now, doing large quantities of GSSR is only truly possible in English, not in other languages, and with institutions providing a large collection of comprehensible, interesting books. Spanish books, however, are becoming more plentiful.

This is a problem we can solve. Putting together a library of good, easy, interesting books, would cost about the same as buying two computers and a few of the complex, expensive and untested programs we currently cheerfully purchase.

We can do a lot better. Let's try this out. It's very promising. We've got the research supporting it. Students like it. It's easy to do. Let's try it.