

READING THROUGH MULTI MEDIA: WASTEFUL OR WORTHWHILE

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Nowadays, the pressure is on to produce results in terms of teaching English as a foreign language. Given the time constraints of the curriculum, however, the only way to maximize existing resources is by providing sufficient channels for self-study. In this sense, we are blessed by the advances made in the field of computers over the past 30 years, and in particular the invention of the CD-ROM. Kaufmann (1992) argues that “computers may help to overcome the difficulties posed by a heterogenous class with the provision of a readily available range of materials, diverse in their level of difficulty and subject areas. The ability of many computer programs to produce instant feedback further frees the teacher to spend time with a larger number of learners than would be possible if the teacher was solely responsible for the correction of the work.”

In my experience, the use of computers as an extension of the EFL classroom has a number of other benefits as well. Firstly, the use of computers can have a positive effect on the learner and foster a sense of empowerment. Secondly, the learner can work on his own without any fear of anyone else observing the task level or any errors that he might make. Conversely, of course, the group dynamic can be called into play as well in that students can work on the computer in small groups. This is particularly beneficial for low-level students who, by working with their friends, may

develop confidence from the input of other students. The computers in the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI) allow for flexible access to the material at hand at any time that happens to be convenient to the students themselves. Flexible access also increases the likelihood that expensive resources are being used more efficiently.

Then again, there is the high motivational value of using computers. The current generation of students feels more at home in front of a monitor than with a traditional textbook. Furthermore, the opportunity to add color, animation, still and moving pictures to the text is yet another factor in motivating the students to access reading materials on-line or on CD-ROM. Apart from being able to tackle reading material at their own pace, students are also gaining familiarity with the basic computing and keyboarding skills that they will need when they enter the working world after graduation.

The purpose of this paper is to show what we have done here at CULI in terms of providing self-study materials for students at Chula taking Foundation English (FE) I and II, and for those in faculties throughout the university taking more faculty-specific English for Academic Purpose (EAP) courses. It is also designed to soothe the fears of any of the students who might be suffering an unnecessary attack of

technophobia. I myself am one of the least technically-minded people. Yet, by combining my experience as a teacher of EFL with the skills and expertise of one of the most competent members of our auxiliary staff, Khun Kingkamol, I have been able to make a small foray into the world of multi-media by creating a series of reading materials on CD-ROM for use in our SALC. I would be the first one to admit that they are far from perfect, that they have been created by a process of trial and error, and that there is still much that could be done to explore the use of computers in general and the exploitation of multimedia in particular. However, I am convinced that they fulfill a very real need on the part of the student body as a whole and agree with Armstrong and Yetter-Vassot (1994) that, the use of technology is about empowering the learner. It is about encouraging students to leave behind the notion that learning means rote memorization. It is about exploration and the realization that there are multiple pathways to knowledge” (p.483). I think we, as teachers of English as a Foreign Language, should also develop the same realization and embrace the new technology in that it holds out the possibility of extending the boundaries of the classroom and not only of expanding students’ knowledge but also of fostering their cognitive skills as well.

Things to be considered when preparing reading paragraph

Basically, one has to rely on one’s common sense and on one’s experience as an English teacher, taking into account the needs, interests and varying ability levels of one’s students. Here too, the new technology comes into play; no longer do

you need to wade through piles of back issues of “Time,” “Newsweek,” or “Readers’ Digest”. Every major English-language publication has an online presence in the form of its own website, complete with an archive of back issues with articles on a virtually infinite number of subjects. The subject matter itself should be of interest to the students, informative and entertaining. There is a difference between learning to use the language and using the language to learn. Preferably, therefore, the passage you choose should be one that is informative – one that leaves the students with the feeling not only that they have practiced reading in English, but that they have learned something useful – or at least something interesting.

Secondly, of course, the level should be appropriate to the students’ level of ability. It is no use expecting our students to climb Mount Everest when they are still having difficulties in the foothills. Original texts can be edited in order to suit our needs, shortened and simplified, for example, wherever necessary. The next step is to create some kind of pre-reading activity to activate the students’ schemata of the subject at hand. This is where the multimedia possibilities of the medium can be exploited. For instance, before reading a passage on whales, students could listen to a short sound-bite of whales communicating with one another and asked to guess what creature makes such a sound. This could be followed by a short video clip of grey whales, followed by a question asking students to identify the creature in the clip. Students would then go on to answer a series of questions to elicit what exactly they know about this magnificent creature. For example, where do whales live? Are whales fish or animals? Give reasons for your answer. Which of the following products

rely for their production on dead whales? Which of the following countries kills most whales per year? The page could be brightened up with cartoons of whales “sounding” or blowing water into the air and by the sound of whales heard at the beginning of the exercise. The remaining questions would be virtually the same as one finds in a traditional text, namely questions designed to elicit the main idea, major and minor supporting details.

Then the teacher needs to decide exactly how he/she is going to exploit the language and structure in the text itself. Exercises could be created to test and reinforce important items of vocabulary. We could explore any outstanding structures present in the text and create appropriate exercises. And so the list goes on. To end this particular passage we could add a song, in this case “Farewell to Tarwathie” by Judy Collins – a song about hunting whales off Greenland. We could supply the lyrics in the form of a cloze and as a final exercise have the students write a short summary of the song to be handed in as homework. Or we could ask the students to go on-line and conduct research into Greenpeace and have them write a short paragraph on the kind of work they do. (Guided questions could be provided, of course). So we begin to glimpse just some of the possibilities of using multimedia as a self-study resource. We have made the first tentative steps into the world of edutainment.

There is still much more that could be done of course. For example, hyperlinks could be introduced into the text itself, whereby a student would merely need to click on an unknown word or expression to bring up the meaning on screen together with appropriate examples of its use. To do this, of course, you need the input of a resource

person, someone skilled in the art of programming. Nevertheless, there is good news on the horizon in that CD Read-Write drives are not only coming down in price, they are becoming easier to use – as easy to operate as your home VCR. These devices enable us to “burn” or create our own CDs, whether they be CDs of our favorite photographs, our favorite music or our favorite short stories. The implications for the teaching of EFL are enormous. Plus, blank CDs cost very little – far less than traditional paper-and-print-based texts – not to mention the fact that we are saving the life of a tree somewhere on the planet.

Finally, I’d just like to point out that the ability to read English is an essential skill in today’s world and the ability to read selectively and critically even more so. Thailand, however, with a few notable exceptions, has never really been a society of readers – a problem that has been compounded in recent years by the impact of audio-visual media such as TV, video, and computer games. Consequently, as teachers of EFL, we need to use whatever means at our disposal to combat this trend and introduce our students – through well-chosen, well-presented materials – to the pleasures of reading and the adventure of learning for its own sake. As the Chinese proverb says, “The teacher merely opens the gate; it is up to the student to enter.” If we can make reading an attractive proposition through the use of multimedia, we may encourage more students to take the step, thereby enriching their lives beyond the confines of the university campus.

A List of Recommended Websites

The following is a list of just a few of the sites to be found on the World Wide Web. It represents but a tiny fraction of

what's actually available, but since these sites are connected by hyperlink to dozens of other sites in turn, they should provide teachers with a good starting point.

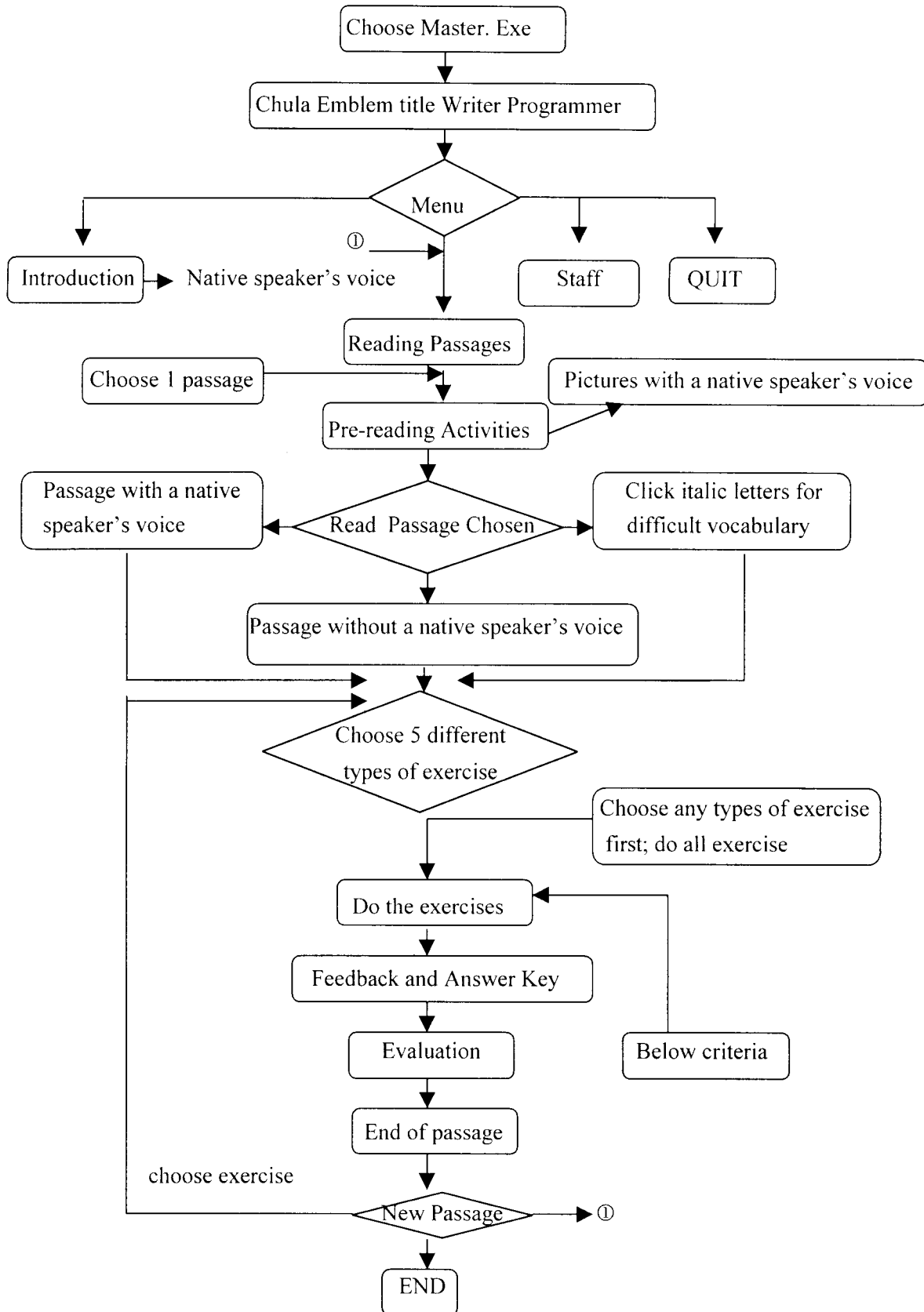
- E-Mail Keypals for Language Fluency (<http://www.Kyoto-su.ac.jp/people/teacher/trobb/keypals.html>)
- Links to ESL/EFL Articles on the Net (<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/iteslj/Links/ArticlesLinks.html>)
The Internet TESL Journal's collection of links to ESL/EFL articles available on the Web.
- TESOL (<http://www.tesol.edu/>)
- Writing and Computers Association (<http://www.cogs.susx.ac.uk/users/mike/wa/wricom.html>)
An association that promotes communication between individuals and groups with an interest in the writing process and in computer support for writing.
- Cobuild Definitions Game (<http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk/defs/gameform.html>)
- Searching for China: A Wepquest (<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/writed/China/Chinaquest.html>)
An amazing project from Pacific Bell where students can work together to create a special to make sense out of a complex country called China.
- Wacky Web Tales (<http://www.hmco.com/hmco/school/index.html>)
A collection of fun stories; students can also have fun creating their own stories by filling in the blanks to The Mummy, The Camping trip, and The Box.
- Where's That From?
An interactive game for guessing the origins of unknown words.
- Grammar Help (<http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi/help/grammar/help/>)
- On-line Grammar help (<http://www.edunet.com/english/grammar/toc.html>)
- English Teaching/Learning Materials (<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/visitors/kenji/kitao/material.htm>)
- ESL Quiz center (<http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/quiz>)
- Heinemann English Language Teaching (<http://www.heinemann.co.uk/heinemann/elt/index.html>)
Lost of free photocopiable activities, tips etc. from Heinemann.
- Ideas and Lesson Plans for Writing Assignments (<http://www.ecnet.net/users/uwwwelp/topics.htm>)
Courtesy of Northeastern Illinois University
- Links to ESL Lessons on the Net
A vast resource courtesy of the Internet TESL Journal
- Purdue University On-line Writing Lab Handouts
A free resource courtesy of the OWL – On-line Writing Lab at Purdue – a pioneer in the field.
- Teachnet.com Lesson Ideas (<http://www.teachnet.com/lesson.html>)
- The Electronic Library (<http://www.elibrary.com>)
Links to over 150 full-text newspapers, 800 magazines, 2 international newswires, 2,000 classic books and much more. After a free trial period, costs \$9.95 a month.
- The Internet Public Library (<http://ipl.sils.umich.edu/>)
Contains the following sections: Reference, Teen, Youth, and MOO, as

- well as a Classroom, Exhibit Hall, and Reading Room.
- The On-line Books Page
(<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/Web/books.html>)
Access to over 2,100 titles in English – full text.
 - ESLoop
(<http://math.unr.edu/linguistics/esloop/esloop.html>)
Collection of ESL/EFL Web sites, each linked to the next.
 - Electronic Newsstand
(<http://www.eneews.com/>)
Links to over 2,000 online magazines. A great resource for teaching materials and researching assignments.
 - National Geographic Online
(<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>)
 - Teacher Contact Database
(<http://www.classroom.net/contact/>)
A database that enables you to contact other teachers interested in key pal exchanges, projects etc.
 - Scripts and Screenplays
(<http://hollywoodu.com/script.htm>)
A collection of scripts and screenplays from the Hollywood Film Institute.
 - CNN Interactive
(<http://www.cnn.com>)
 - ESL Discussion Center
(<http://www.eslcafe.com/discussion/>)
Discussion and help for teachers of ESL/EFL.
 - Grammar Clinic
(<http://www.lydbury.co.uk/grammar/contents.html>)
Edunet's grammar help page. Great resource for students who need remedial help and practice during a writing course.
 - On-line Language Exercise
(<http://www.ilcgroup.com/exercise.html>)
Interactive English language exercises from International House in the UK.
 - Cobuild Idiom of the Day
(<http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk/Idiom.html>)
 - Cool Word of the Day
(<http://www.edu.yorku.ca/-wotd>)
 - On-line Resources for Writers
(<http://webster.comment.edu/writing/writing.htm>)
 - Pizzaz!
(<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu~leslielb/pizzaz.html>)
Creative writing activities and copyable handouts for use in the classroom.

LESSON PRESENTATION

To present examples of the computer-based reading program I have

created, it is necessary first to understand the process of how the program is created and works.



Examples of a computer-based reading program.

The following are some parts of the passage on Ozone Layer which includes (1)

Pre-reading Activities, (2) Passage, (3) Exercises, and (4) Self-Evaluation.

Figure 1: Pre-reading Activities

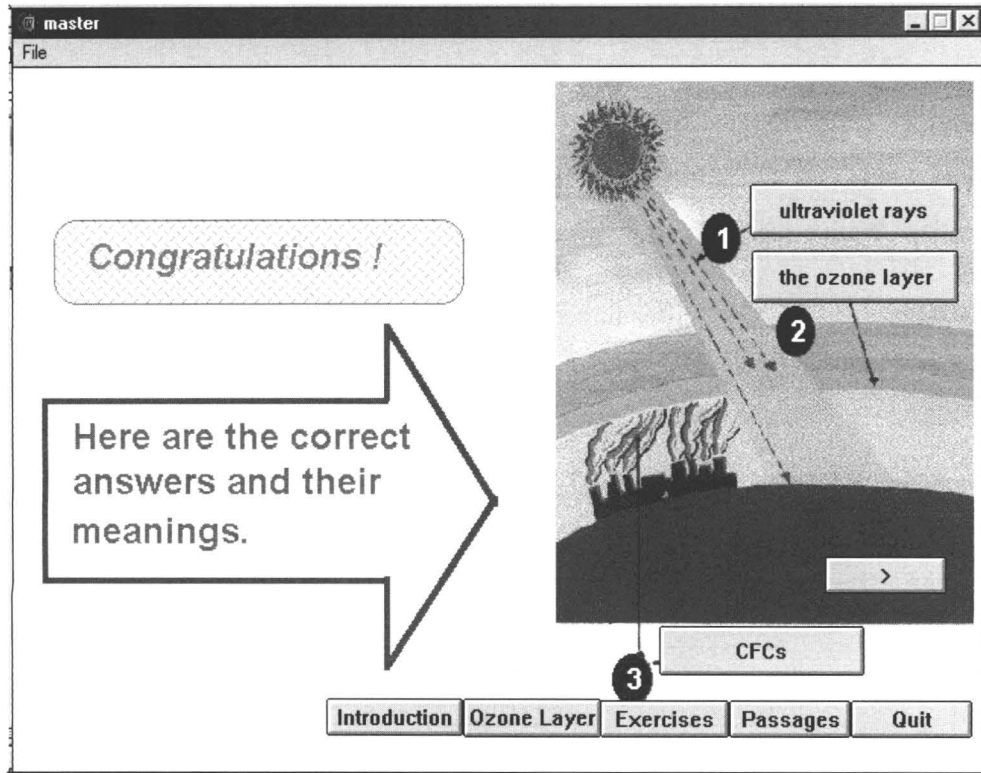


Figure 2: Passage

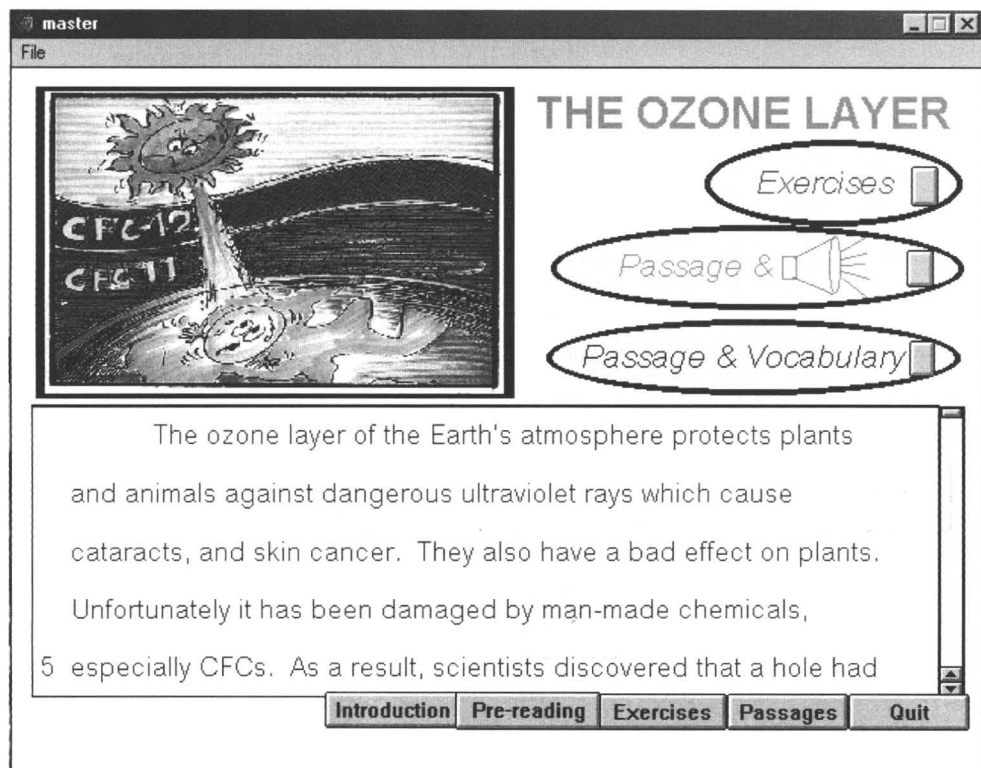
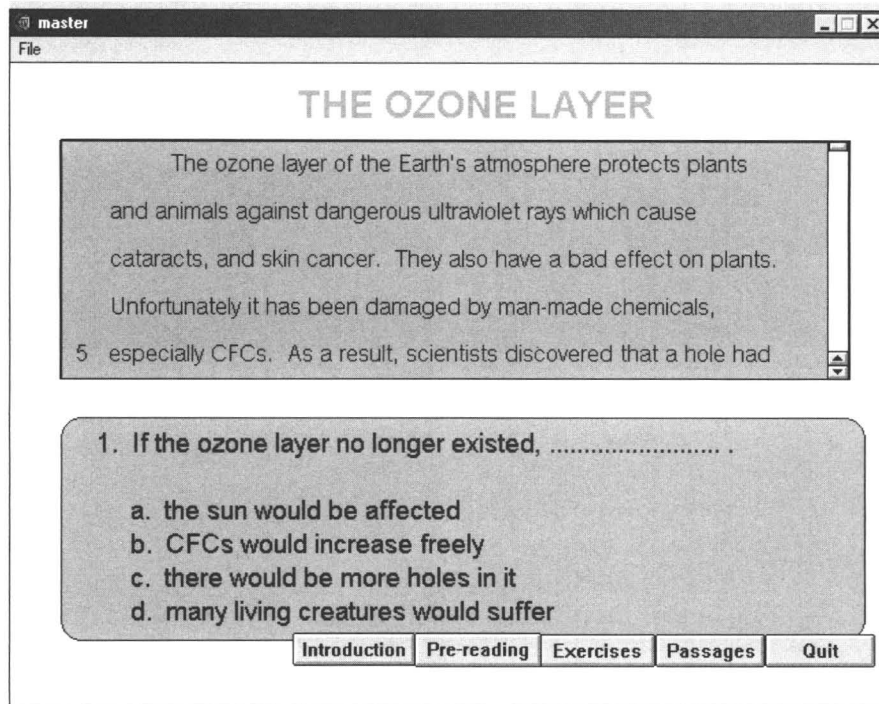
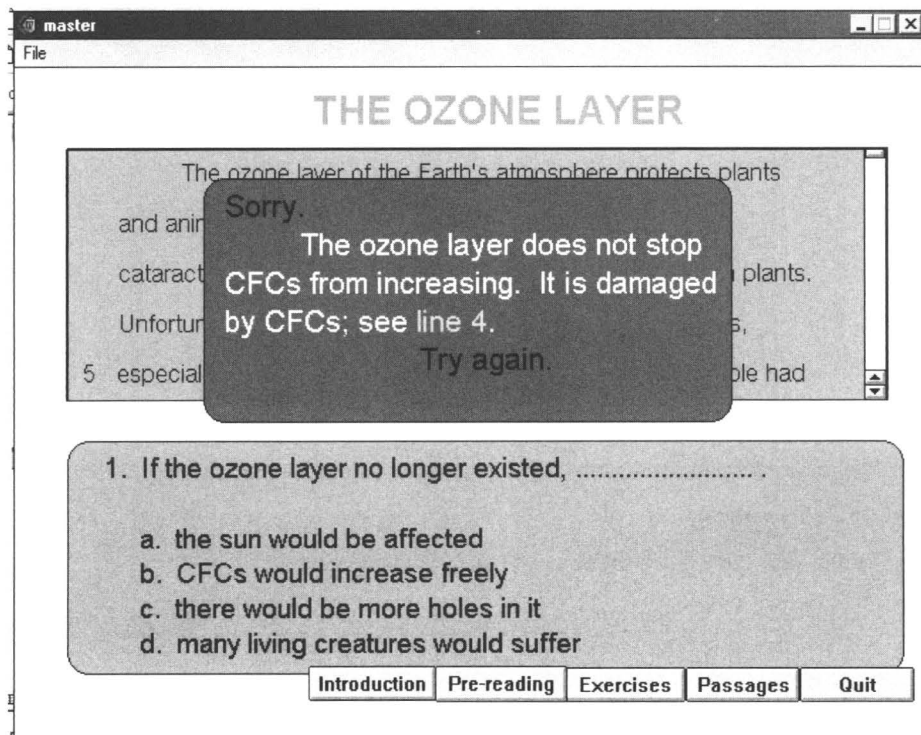


Figure 3: Exercises



While doing the exercise, you can click for the passage.



The screenshot shows a software window titled "master" with a "File" menu. The main content area is titled "THE OZONE LAYER". Below the title, there is a text box containing the sentence: "The ozone layer of the Earth's atmosphere protects plants". A dark grey feedback box contains the text: "Correct! Lines 1-2 tell us that the ozone layer 'protects plants and animals against dangerous ultraviolet rays'. If the ozone layer no longer existed, plants and animals would have no protection, and as the rays are 'dangerous', it is clear they must suffer in some way." Below this, a question box contains: "1. If the ozone layer no longer existed,". The options are: "a. the sun would be affected", "b. CFCs would increase freely", "c. there would be more holes in it", and "d. many living creatures would suffer". At the bottom, there are navigation buttons: "Introduction", "Pre-reading", "Exercises", "Passages", and "Quit".

The screenshot shows a software window titled "master" with a "File" menu. The main content area is titled "OZONE LAYER". It displays a question: "T 1. The ozone layer causes cancer and cataracts." Below the question, a dark grey feedback box contains the text: "Sorry! It is 'F'." followed by "Lines 1-3 state that the ozone layer stops some of the ultraviolet rays reaching the Earth's surface. These rays cause cataracts and skin cancer, so the ozone layer is protecting us." Below the feedback box, there are three more questions: "..... 8. CFCs are no longer being produced in such large quantities as they were.", "..... 9. The world's largest producer of CFCs planned to halt the production of CFCs immediately.", and "..... 10. By the year 2000, there will be no CFCs in the atmosphere." At the bottom, there are navigation buttons: "Introduction", "Pre-reading", "Exercises", "Passages", and "Quit".

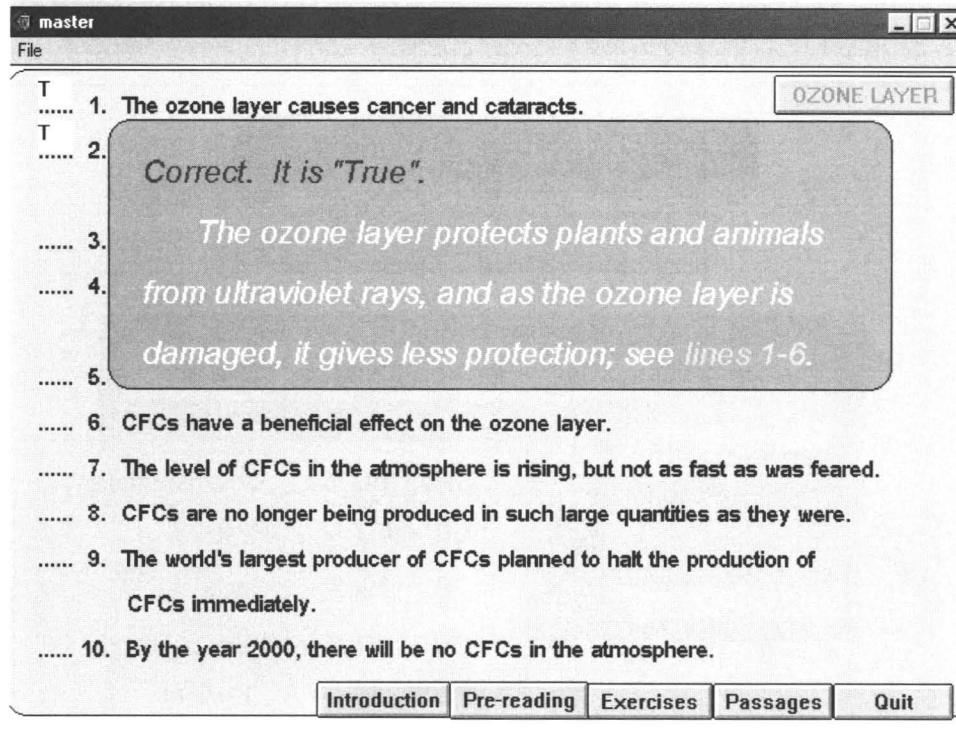
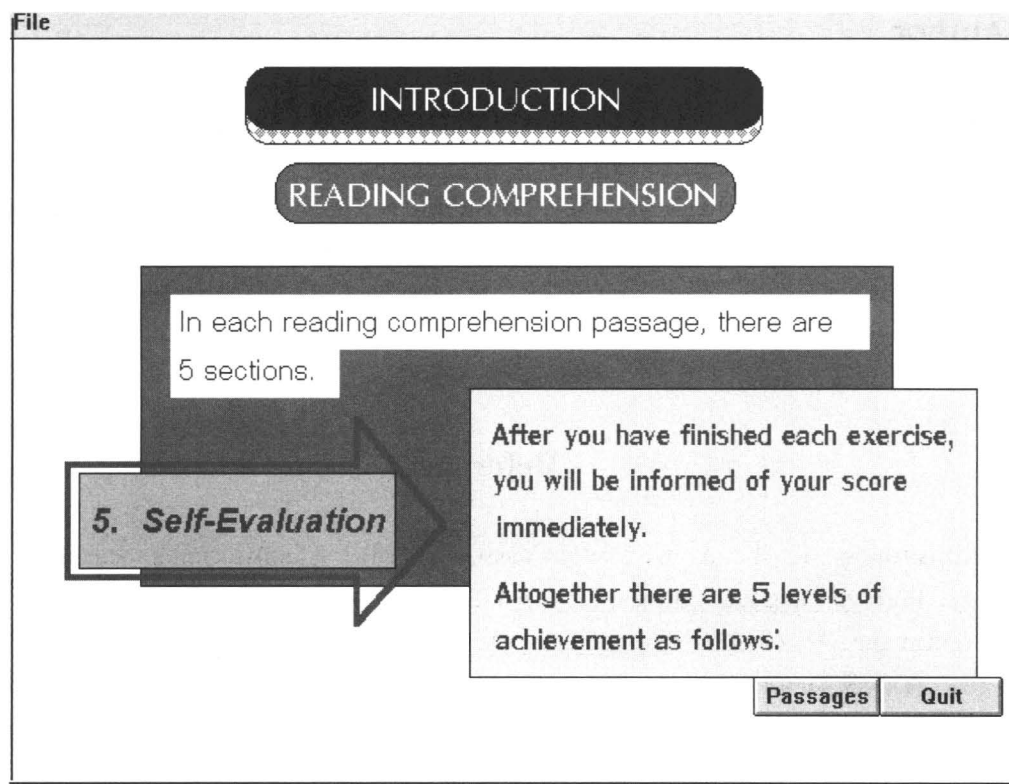
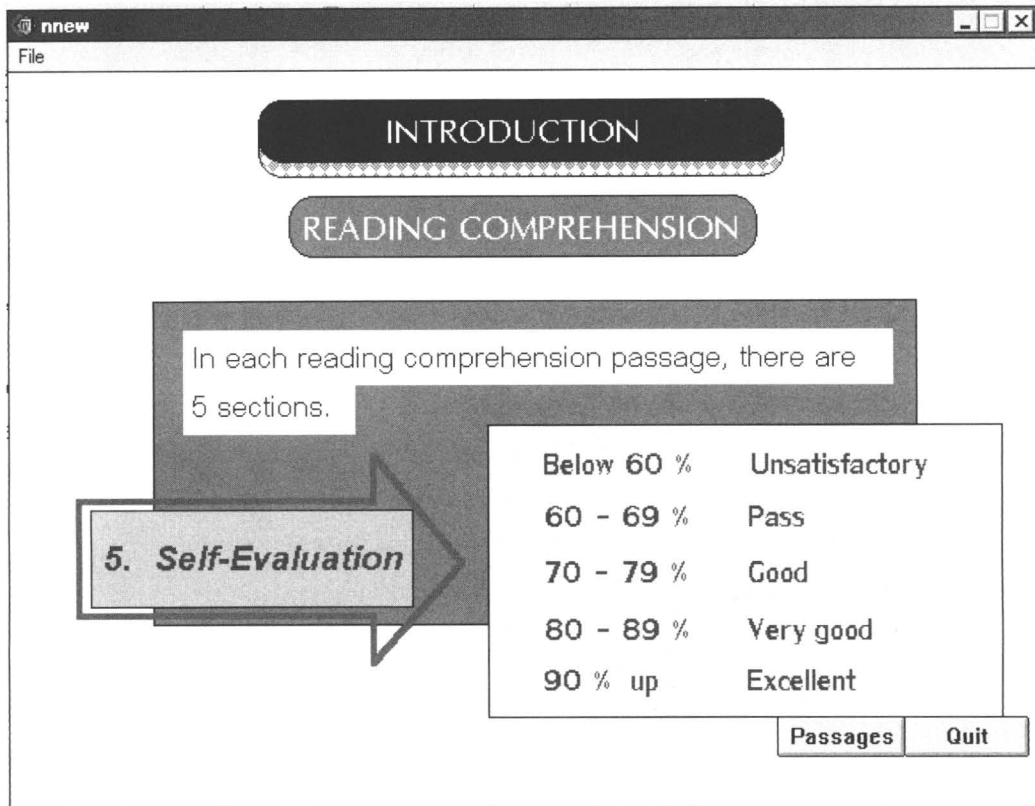


Figure 4: Self-Evaluation





The Author

Malinee Chandavimol, currently an Associate Professor at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI), was Director of CULI between the years 1988-1992. Her particular field of interest lies in teaching reading and in helping students to improve their reading skills. She has written a series of materials entitled "Mastering Reading Skills for University Students," parts of which are used in the Self-Access Learning Center at CULI, and other Self-Access Learning Center in Chulalongkorn University. At present, she is experimenting adapting these materials for use in a multimedia format.

References

Armstrong, K. L. & C. Yetter-Vassot (1994). Transforming teaching through technology. *Foreign Language Annals*, 27, (4), 475-486.

Kaufmann, H. (1992). *Computers: A resource for teaching literacy in the AMEP*. Melbourne: AMES Victoria.