# Corso propedeutico (10 lessons over 5 weeks, 20 hours)

Lesson 1

Introduction to course

Lesson 2

Reading Comprehension

Reading techniques, how to explain words and phrases without the use of a dictionary.

Reading technique

1. Scan read the text (Read the first line of each paragraph and the last line of the last)
2. Read the questions
3. Read for detail. Underline unknown words and phrases. Try to figure out their meaning within the context they are used because you will not be allowed to use a dictionary during the exam.

How to explain the meaning of unfamiliar words:

* Decide what part of speech it is
* Look in the context for clues to its general sense

2 techniques:

* substitution by synonyms
* explanation by analogy

**(In)human nature**

I try to be the best person I can be, but I’m constantly letting myself down. Human nature is largely something that has to be overcome. Lots of little things in life that give me pleasure are usually connected to someone else’s misfortune. Not big misfortunes, not even misfortunes, more inconveniences; little victories in my life that keep me going. Before you start to hate me, let me give you a few examples and see if they sound familiar.

1. You’re standing in line for a very popular movie. You’re warned about whether or not you will get in. You wait ten minutes. You turn around. You are no longer at the end of the line. There are at least thirty people behind you who have less of a chance of getting in than you do, and if they do, you will almost certainly get a better seat. What is your reaction? Do you say to the people behind you, “Hey, you can all get in front of me, I can see this movie tomorrow night.” No, you feel happy – admit it, you feel happy…..or am I the only one?
2. I’m staying in a hotel, and while walking down the corridor I always peek in other people’s hotel rooms to see if they are nicer than mine. If their room is nicer, I rationalise to myself, “It’s just a room, I’m going to be sleeping in it most of the time.” However, if my room is nicer, I think, “Ha, ha, I got a better room.”
3. We all know life isn’t fair but restaurant service should be. When I sit down at a restaurant and the people who sit down fifteen minutes after me get served first, I’m furious, unless I’m the later person who got served. I don’t wait and say “I’m not eating until the people who got here before me are taken care of. I eat and eat.
4. This is something that must not go farther than this page. Sometimes, when I’m in an elevator and I see someone running towards it, I…I…I pretend I can’t find the Open Door button. There, I said it. It has nothing to do with the character of the person who wants to come in. I don’t even particularly want to be alone. I just don’t want to press the button.
5. I’m in the movie theatre, a woman with an enormous head sits down directly in front of the person sitting next to me. I am amused, but only for a few seconds before she changes her mind and sits directly in front of me.

There are more things about myself that I’m ashamed of but I’m going to stop here, just in case it’s not really human nature……and I’m the only one.

Adapted from *Naked Beneath My Clothes* by

Rita Rudner

# Reading Comprehension

# *Please answer the following questions. Questions 3, 4 and 5 are to be answered in your own words as far as possible.*

1. “letting myself down” means a) succeeding b) disappointing myself c) trying on my own d) allowing myself to fall
2. “peek” means a) look b) enter c) call d) knock on the door
3. “human nature has to be overcome” means……………………………………..
4. Why does the writer not want to be “the only one”?
5. What is your opinion of the writer?

**Sample answers**

3) “human nature has to be overcome” means that we have to control our desire to behave as nature tells us to behave. We can’t just follow our natural instincts. We can’t just behave as we like, following our feelings.

4) The writer does not want to be “the only one” because she wants to believe that everybody is like her. If doing mean things is part of human nature, then everybody has to do it, not just her. If she is not the only one behaving in such a way, this shows that what she does is actually part of human nature.

5) I think the writer is someone who knows how to control her human nature. She is quite critical of the whole notion of human nature. She chooses examples from everyday life about human nature that we have all experienced or can relate to. But she doesn’t really believe that people have to behave in such a way. She is being ironic to make a point: that people can and should control their feelings. They shouldn’t use the notion of human nature as an excuse. Education can be a way to fight human nature.

Lesson 3

Topics:

*Summary, Paraphrasing, Writing in your own words.*

# Brief guide to summary writing

1. A summary should be about one third the length of the original passage, that is, if you are asked to summarise the whole passage. If you are asked to summarise only a part of the passage, stick to the word limit given, such as 20 or 50 words.
2. Every important idea must be retained, preferably in the order in which it appears in the original. Unimportant points and details must be discarded. Your job is to decide what the important and unimportant points are.
3. A summary should be written in the third person. This means that if you are summarising a passage written in the first person, you should describe, in the third person, what happens in the passage. If you don’t know if it is a man or a woman who is speaking in the first person, write ‘the writer’ or ‘the author’ in you summary.
4. A summary should follow the tense of the original.
5. Even if you do not agree with what you have read in the passage, do not **criticise** or **pass judgment** in your summary. Your job is just to summarise the main points of a passage to show that you have understood it. A **critical** **appraisa**l of a passage is not called a summary but a **review**. So, do not include **personal opinions**, ideas or knowledge in your summary.
6. Direct quotes, if they are fundamental to the passage and therefore to the summary, may be paraphrased and written in indirect speech.
7. Try to capture the tone or feeling of the original. Is it humourous, ironic, biased, serious, academic?
8. Write your summary in your own words

Example:

“If I asked most **people** if they made risotto at home I reckon most would say ‘no’, and would think it was just **poncy** **restaurant** food…But risottos are really meant to be cooked at **home**—**you** can prepare them easily, and can make them warming and wholesome or delicate and light. They are **cheap** and can be eaten all year round. I think a few restaurants bastardize the whole method and principle of risotto. The perfect risotto should slowly **ooze** across the plate, not be made into a tower or a **mould**—the fact that it isn’t moving tells you that it’s too dry. Yuck!”

from Jamie Oliver’s *The Naked Chef* (p.169)

Summarized version

Jamie Oliver argues that risotto is an economical dish that is easy to cook at home, is suitable for any season and can be made so that it is either nourishing or lighter and more subtly flavoured. He also argues that, while risotto is frequently thought of as what he calls ‘poncy restaurant food’, restaurant-prepared versions of the dish are sometimes too dry and, as such, detract from its true character/and that is not the way risotto should be.

 from Peter Redman’s Writing in your own words (Open University)

In-class exercise: Read the following passage--how would you summarize it/rewrite it in your own words?

The invention of the process of **printing** from **movable type**, which occurred in **Germany** about **the middle of the fifteenth century**, was destined to exercise a far-reaching **influence on all the vernacular languages of Europe**. Introduced into **England** about 1476 by **William Caxton**, who had learned the art on the continent, printing made such rapid progress that a scant century later it was observed that **manuscript books were seldom to be met with and almost never used**. Some idea of the rapidity with which the new process swept forward may be had from the fact that **in Europe the number of books printed before the year 1500 reached the surprising figure of 35,000**. **The majority of these, it is true, were in Latin**, whereas it is in the modern languages that the effect of the printing press is chiefly felt. But in **England over 20,000 titles in English had appeared by 1640**, ranging all the way from mere pamphlets to massive folios. The result was to **bring books**, which had formerly been the expensive luxury of the few, **within the reach of all**. More important, however, was the fact, so obvious today, that it was **possible to reproduce a book in a thousand copies** or a hundred thousand, every one exactly like the other. A powerful force thus existed for promoting **a standard uniform language,** and the means were now available for spreading that language throughout the territory in which it was understood. (Baugh, *A History of the English Language*)

Textbook summary:

Printing from movable type, invented in Germany about 1450 and brought to England by William Caxton about 1476, had a far-reaching influence (*had a significant effect/had a widespread influence*) on all European vernacular languages. Within a hundred years, manuscript books had become rare. Though at first most printed books were in Latin, over 20,000 titles in English had appeared by 1640. Printing made it possible to reproduce (*duplicat*e) copies of the same book. Books were now within the reach of (*available for*) everyone and could exert a powerfulstandardizing influence upon the language. (83 words)

Student’s summary

Printing, invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century, was introduced into England in 1476 by William Caxton. A century later manuscript books had almost disappeared. Before 1500, 35,000 books, most in Latin, were printed in Europe, but in England over 20,000 books in English had appeared by 1640. Books, within reach of poor and rich alike, promoted the spread of standardized English throughout the English linguistic territory. (68 words)

Lesson 4-10

Lady Diana and The Panorama Interview (see separate files).