

Basics

In *C21 English for the 21st Century*, you do various tasks which begin by asking you to predict the content of a text. Predicting in this case means using the context (where the text is found) and peripheral information, such as photos and graphics, to guess what the text is about. These are usually linked to the content and not just there for decoration. By far the most useful predictor of content is the title or heading/subheading of the piece. Usually, these will reflect what the text contains, so you will be able to decide at a glance whether or not it is useful for you – before you even read it. There is further work on predicting content in ***Evaluate texts*** and ***Speed-reading strategies***.

The academic context

When we have a lot of material to read, it is rarely possible to read it all. The ability to predict content gives us an advantage because we can immediately eliminate texts that will probably not suit our needs, spending our time instead on those that are more likely to be useful. One good thing about predicting is that it is useful even if our predictions turn out to be wrong – predicting activates the knowledge we already have about a subject, making us more prepared to process new information.

Key features

When you are looking at a text for the first time, consider these points:

- Use the context to help you. Where did you find the text? Is it written by an expert? Does this publication usually produce trustworthy texts?
- Use the photos/illustrations to help you. What do they suggest about the content?
- Look for diagrams/graphs. Do they seem to be relevant to your needs?
- Look at the title/headings. Do they suggest the text contains something useful to you?

If, after you have answered the questions above, a text looks useful, you can do further predicting by reading the first sentence or paragraph. Does it seem to be opinion-based, or does it look like it is backed up with references and statistics? Is there very emotional language (suggesting it will be less objective)?

If you are reading something for more detail, you can also predict the contents of the next paragraph based on what came before. For example, if one paragraph ends, 'It was then that he made his biggest discovery', it is logical to predict that the next paragraph will talk about that discovery (even if your prediction is wrong, you will still have saved time because you will recognize very quickly what the next paragraph is about).

Challenges / difficulties

One of the biggest challenges with predicting is that we cannot be 100% accurate. On the internet, especially, a text can look very professional and yet it is very poorly written or contains misleading information. Sometimes, photos are chosen merely to decorate the text, with very little thought about how relevant they are. Even worse, sometimes deliberately misleading photos or headings are used in order to attract readers to a text. You need to use your judgement and experience.

Although prior knowledge of the subject is activated by predicting, it is important not to let our prior knowledge influence our understanding *too much*. We need to focus on what the writer says – not just the things we already know about the subject.

How can I develop this skill?

As with many study skills, experience is the best teacher. The more you read, the better you will become at predicting.

Learning outcome

When you become good at predicting, you will be able to dismiss irrelevant texts within seconds. This will leave you with more valuable time to spend on texts with more relevant and useful content.

Theory to practice

Look at the extracts below. Based only on what you see, complete the sentences about the content of each article.


1



Global issues

I expect this text to be about _____
and to contain information about _____

2



Generational differences in the workplace

The article is probably about _____

3



Defining and achieving goals

One personal development goal that many people set themselves is to want to learn a new language. The problem with this is that learning a language can be a lifelong task. Phrased this way, the goal is too broad and too long-term, plus it does not define how you will know that you have achieved the goal.

Step 1

Break the goal into smaller, achievable steps.
To start with, choose a specific short-term goal. For example, 'I want to take a basic Spanish class' or 'My English is quite good, but I want to be able to tell jokes in English.'

Step 2

Define how you are going to achieve Step 1.
Will you join a class or enrol on an online course? Will you teach yourself at home? Will you listen to English comedians on YouTube?

The article probably suggests steps to help you _____
The steps might include _____

Ways to get more practice

The exercises on the Worksheet will help. Apart from that, learn to look at texts with a critical eye. The more you do it, the easier it becomes.