



What about the fifth skill of viewing?

We are living in a visual world. The advent of the Internet and the digital revolution, the ubiquity of mobile devices which allow us to capture still and moving images easily, the appearance of video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, and the emergence of social media networks such as Instagram and Facebook whose users upload largely visual content, have all contributed to an extraordinary rise in visual communication and to the image, and increasingly the moving image, becoming the primary mode of communication around the world.

The majority of texts young people are encountering and creating are multimodal. The fact that communication nowadays is largely multimodal changes the construct of communicative competence. This has huge implications for our educational systems.

The changing nature of communication is reflected by the fact that in the English language curricula of a number of countries, for example, Singapore, Canada and Australia, two new skills, 'viewing' and 'visually representing' have been added to the traditional skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

We are going to look at what 'viewing' is, why it's important in the language classroom, what effective viewers do, and then explore three tried and tested frameworks we can use to implement viewing in the language classroom and improve our students' viewing skills.

What is viewing?

In the Canadian Common Curriculum Framework viewing is defined as follows: "an active process of attending and comprehending visual media, such as television, advertising images, films, diagrams, symbols, photographs, videos, drama, drawings, sculpture, and paintings." So 'viewing' is about 'reading' – analysing, evaluating and appreciating – visual texts. Viewing is an active rather than a passive process.

Why is viewing important?

We are language teachers, so it's obvious we should focus on the written and spoken word in our classes. So why should images and multimodal texts that use images matter at all to language teachers? Many teachers argue that language and text-based approaches should take priority and that the image just distracts from the word. However, as the majority of texts our students are accessing outside the classroom are visual texts and multimodal texts which use images, surely we should give our students opportunities to 'read' – analyse and evaluate – these types of texts in the classroom. Furthermore, the majority of these multimodal texts – YouTube videos, infographics, websites, blogs, social media sites – are a combination of print text and image, where the image, far from distracting from the text, actually enhances it.

Therefore, viewing is important because as students are dealing with mainly multimodal texts they need to understand them and to become more effective, active and critical viewers to be able to participate fully in society. Viewing helps students develop the knowledge and skills to analyse and evaluate visual texts and multimodal texts that use visuals. Viewing also helps students acquire information and appreciate ideas and experiences visually communicated by others.

What do active viewers do?

According to the Canadian Common Curriculum Framework, active and effective viewers would ask themselves a series of questions such as:

- What is the text representing?
- How is the text constructed?
- What assumptions, interests, beliefs, biases and values are portrayed by the text?
- What is the purpose of the text?
- To whom is the text directed? Who does the text exclude?
- What is my reaction to the text? What causes this reaction?
- What personal connections and associations can I make with this text?

It's important that students are aware that understanding the viewing process is as important as understanding the listening and reading process. Students should understand that effective, active viewers engage in the following procedure:

a. Pre-viewing: Students prepare to view by activating their schema (the prior knowledge they bring to the study of a topic or theme), anticipating a message, predicting, speculating, asking questions, and setting a purpose for viewing.

b. During Viewing: Students view the visual text to understand the message by seeking and checking understanding by making connections, making and confirming predictions and inferences, interpreting and summarising, pausing and reviewing, and analysing and evaluating. Students should monitor their understanding by connecting to their schema, questioning and reflecting.

c. After Viewing or Responding: Students should be given opportunities to respond personally, critically, and creatively to visual texts. Students respond by reflecting, analysing, evaluating and creating.

Viewing frameworks

We're now going to explore three frameworks which have been developed by prestigious institutions to help students become better viewers. These models, which have been tried and tested with thousands of students at schools and universities around the world with great success, help to systematise viewing effectively into the language classroom.

Film and video

The 3Cs and 3Ss

This framework was developed by Into Film <https://www.intofilm.org/> and is used widely in schools in the UK. The 3Cs (Colour, Camera, Character) and the 3Ss, (Story, Setting, Sound) framework can be used to help students discuss and analyse all the elements of a film text. Story, Setting, Sound, Colour, Character and Camera are simple headings with discussion questions teachers can use as an easy way for exploring any film. Here are some of the discussion questions:

Colour

- What colours do you see?
- What do the colours make you feel?
- Why do you think certain colours are used?
- What mood do you think the colours create?

Camera

- What shots have been used? Can you name them?
- Through whose eyes do we see the story?
- When do we see different characters' point of view?
- When does the camera move and when does it stay still?

Character

- What do the main characters look like?
- How do they speak and what do they say?
- How do they behave?
- What character interests you the most? Why?

Story

- What happens in the beginning, middle and at the end of the story?
- What are the most important things (events) that happen in the story?
- How do we know where the story takes place?
- How long does the story take place in 'real' time?

Setting

- Where does the action take place?
- When and how does the setting change?
- How could you tell where the story was taking place?
- How could you tell when the story was taking place?

Sound

- How many different sounds do you hear? What are they?
- How does the music make you feel?
- Are there any moments of silence?
- Can you hear any sound effects?

The simplicity of the 3Cs and 3Ss framework makes it easy to remember and use.

Paintings and photographs

See, Think, Wonder

The See, Think, Wonder routine is one of the Visible Thinking Routines

http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03a_ThinkingRoutines.html

developed by researcher-educators for Project Zero <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/>

at Harvard University. This routine helps students make careful observations and develop their own ideas and interpretations based on what they see when viewing a painting or photograph by asking these three questions.

- What do you see?
- What do you think about what you see?
- What does it make you wonder?

By separating the two questions, ‘What do you see?’ and ‘What do you think about what you see?’, the routine helps students distinguish between observations and interpretations. By encouraging students to wonder and ask questions, the routine stimulates students’ curiosity and helps students reach for new connections.

This routine is designed to be easy to remember, practical and invite a broad range of thinking moves. Watch this video to see the See Think Wonder routine being put into practice with [secondary](#) school students

The Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

The Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) <https://vtshome.org/>

approach, was co-developed by Abigail Housen, and Philip Yenawine 30 years ago, and finds meaning in imagery and developing visual literacy through learning in the arts, fostering thinking and communication skills through listening carefully and expressing oneself. The approach works in the following way.

- Students silently examine carefully selected art images
- The teacher asks these three open-ended questions
 - What's going on in this picture?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?

Students

- Look carefully at the image
- Talk about what they observe
- Back up their ideas with evidence
- Listen and consider the views of others
- Discuss many possible interpretations
- Construct meaning together

The teacher

- Listens carefully to each comment
- Paraphrases student responses demonstrating language use
- Points to features described in the artwork throughout the discussion
- Facilitates student discussions
- Encourages scaffolding of observations and interpretations
- Validates individual views
- Links related ideas and points of agreement/disagreement
- Reinforces a range of ideas

Watch these videos to see the Visual Thinking Strategies approach being put into practice with primary <https://vtshome.org/> and secondary <https://bit.ly/3cNdieq> school students.

Conclusions

Viewing helps students to slow down, reflect and think about the images they are seeing, and develop the knowledge and skills to analyse and evaluate visual texts and multimedia texts that use visuals. Viewing also helps students acquire information and appreciate ideas and experiences visually communicated by others. Undoubtedly, viewing will become part of English language curricula in many more countries in the near future and we, as teachers, need to be able to help our students become more effective viewers. To achieve this there needs to be specific multimodality and visual literacy training on pre-service and in-service training courses.

References

Canadian Common Curriculum Framework

Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Yukon Territory. (1998). *The common curriculum framework for English language arts kindergarten to grade 12: Western Canadian protocol for collaboration in basic education* (2nd ed.). Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training.

Into Film

<https://www.intofilm.org/>

Visible Thinking Routines

http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03a_ThinkingRoutines.html

Project Zero, Harvard University

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/>

Visual Thinking Strategies

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