



Easy-to-read gamification

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1. Gamification of Easy-to-read literature

Gamification is originally a term invented in the world of computers. In recent years, different gamification techniques have become popular also in pedagogy. Gamification of literature means today mainly to use games and game-similar techniques to **acquire and process the contents** in schoolbooks and literary works. Through work with literature in various ways, the reader or pupil is **engaged** and the **interaction** between book and reader increases, which enhances the value of both the book and the reading process for the reader.

Among children and teenagers, the popularity of internet games is growing while reading skills and motivation to read books are diminishing. Games require time and attention. Scholars, teachers and media increasingly observe a worrying trend: more pupils leave school with inadequate or poor skills in reading and reading comprehension, and the number of unfamiliar readers is growing. In our discussions especially with teachers, the same question always returns: *How can we **motivate and encourage** unfamiliar or unmotivated readers, who spend many hours each day playing games, to read?*

Team Bokpil has since the start in 2015 directed efforts to test various methods and to invent new ways to encourage reading. We have developed several directions for Easy-to-read, among others **pedagogical Easy-to-reads** and Easy-to-read literature for **minority languages** and **endangered languages**. We are not afraid of trying things nobody has done as yet. Our question is always: Does it work at all? The answer is: We do not know before we have tried. Some things work better and others not so well, or users find them only after a few years. Our aim is to create as much versatile materials as possible for various kinds of users. **Gamification of fiction** is something completely new – hardly anything can be found even in the standard language. Is it possible to gamify fiction? How about Easy-to-read books? How can it be done? For whom is it suitable – mostly for those who have difficulties to concentrate, or for all?

In our gamified Easy-to-read books language and contents become more difficult at each **language level**. Every chapter corresponds to a specific language level from **Easiest** to **Advanced** language. Within or after the chapters are tasks, questions and games. The reader and the teacher can **observe** during the reading on which level the reader or pupil succeeds, which levels are free from obstacles and which require more work. Gamified literature could offer especially for unfamiliar and unmotivated readers a possibility to enter the path of reading and continue on it.

In five adapted books in Swedish we have either simplified the Easy text **in terms of language** (*Fix the focus, Catch the eye, The heart of the cook*, originally Level 3 – Easy), or made the language more **difficult** (*Philip in the forest, Philip at the zoo*, from level 1 – easiest). We have in other words **processed** Easy-to-read to Easy-to-read and chosen those parts of the books which push the story forward, while reworking the text to all five language levels from easiest to advanced language. The gamified texts can be found in each book post in Swedish and the games on **Quizlet**. We have also published two books on **critical reading of sources**, directly as gamified books: *Philip and the spider* and *The palm and the spy* (2022). Gamified books are a **tool** for teachers and readers. Maybe gamification is not a solution to all problems, but rather a further possibility to use in order to obtain **pleasure and enjoyment** from reading.

2. Read and play

It is easier for eyes and brain to absorb the contents of an Easy-to-read text, because the **mechanical reading** (grasping the text) happens more smoothly than in standard language used in society.

Easy-to-read books have a **clear structure** and **storyline**, and the books are **thinner** than most in standard language. Easy-to-read literature is today available at libraries and on the internet, and for all Bokpil books there are also free extra materials. But something more is needed to make reading **attractive** – it is not enough that a book is easier to read in order to entice unfamiliar readers to read a whole book.

The aim with **gamification** of Easy-to-read books is to give as many people as possible a chance to read. In society today it is very important to possess good reading ability, because the information flow is only growing and we all need to absorb new written materials every day.

This is the first time Easy-to-read books are gamified. Team Bokpil has worked to create this new format from an idea – without models, because they do not exist – since autumn 2021.

Gamified Easy-to-read literature consists of texts, either shortened and adapted from existing books or written directly as gamified books, with questions and tasks or games. In the **gamified Easy-to-read texts** we have chosen the **language levels** as basis. With each language level increases also the complexity of language and text, from easiest to advanced language. The levels show the reader which language level is working for them. After reading the gamified texts, the reader can choose to read a whole Easy-to-read book which suits the personal language level.

Two books, *Philip and the spider* and *The palm and the spy* (2022) were **written directly as gamified** books. We placed pictures with numbers in relevant places, referring to the key at the end of the books. There the reader is encouraged to read the text with **source criticism, ask questions** and **find out more**. The reader gets in this way a possibility to analyse, question and think about various aspects of the text, which can increase interest for the theme and reading overall.

For five earlier books we have gamified in Swedish, *Philip in the forest*, *Philip at the zoo*, *The heart of the cook*, *Fix the focus* and *Catch the eye* there is a game on **Quizlet** after each language level. The texts can be read both in digital format on the internet (they are found with other extra materials at each title), and there are also links to the games embedded in the files.

The games are played with **time** and each player can see the results in comparison with others. After the reader has played one level, the text continues, and the reader plays again on the next level after the following level. This structure supports especially persons with concentration difficulties.

What is the benefit of playing and reading, reading and playing? The game technique is already well-known especially among children and teenagers and they do not need to learn anything new. **Instead of only playing games, playing receives added value from reading.** At the same time the reading skills and comprehension can develop and gain significance through playing, an activity filled with enjoyment.

Through games, unfamiliar and unmotivated readers can be **brought into reading through the back door**. Those who wish to read more can read the whole book free of charge on the internet.

3. Two new language levels

Language levels create discussion. In Sweden language levels have been established for many years, but **in Finland Bokpil has, as the sole publisher, worked with, developed practice for and marked language levels** in books since 2015.

The language levels aim at guiding the reader to **find the right** book among the existing hundreds of Easy-to-read books. The language level can for example be such that the reader can manage with, believes is possible to manage without trouble or wishes to achieve.

The language level shows only how **easy or difficult the language is**, not how challenging the contents are. The contents in an Easy-to-read book can require more work than the language itself.

Team Bokpil started with three language levels:

- **Level 1 – easiest**, contains short and simple words, sentences and lines
- **Level 2 – easier**, slightly more difficult words, longer sentences and lines are used
- **Level 3 – easy**, the language is closer to standard language, but still easy

The standard language is the language spoken and written in society and taught at school.

Team Bokpil chose not to create strict rules for language levels. If the criteria are too limited, the language cannot live and breathe, but will become stiff and boring. The language in Easy-to-read books must flow **naturally** even when being clear and simple.

In our work with different types of readers, we have during the past few years noted that these three levels are not enough. We realized also that we must be **clearer** about what the differences between the language levels are.

Many readers need now a few additional levels, and teachers have asked for methods to **measure** reading skills and reading comprehension. Therefore we developed gamified Easy-to-read books with two further language levels:

- **Level 4 – standard language**, still explicit and clear language, but words, sentences and lines are as long as in standard language
- **Level 4+ – advanced language**, an explicit standard language where also scientific terms and difficult words occur; the text looks similar to a book in standard language

These five language levels give readers, teachers and pupils plus language students a possibility to observe which language level functions and which requires more work. When the books are also gamified, the reader can **test reading and word comprehension** directly and get feedback.

Two new books about critical reading of sources, *Philip and the spider* and *The palm and the spy* (2022), were written directly on all these language levels. The differences between the language levels and how the text gradually becomes more difficult can be observed clearly in them.

Examples and a broader discussion about language levels can be read in Sabira Stahlberg's book *Easy-to-read inspiration* (2022) which can be found free of charge on this web site.

4. Easy-to-read gamification in education

Gamification of Easy-to-read literature is a new method based on shorter units of text which are mixed with games, questions and tasks, engaging and activating the reader. Bokpil's **gamified** Easy-to-read texts and books contain questions and tasks either after or within each chapter.

Gamified Easy-to-read literature can be used **on all educational levels** and for **language teaching** in various ways, for example:

- **Inclusion:** An important aspect is that all in a group are included in both reading and playing games. All can participate in the activity, even weaker readers or those who only have a limited vocabulary in a new language.
- **Accessibility:** The texts exist in digital format and the games are free of charge. It is enough that the reader-player has access to internet. The material is accessible around the clock and can be read and played as many times as desired.
- **Diversity:** Various ways to read and play are possible, and each reader-player can choose their own strategy.
- **Common activity:** Reading becomes more interesting and more exciting when the group reads and plays together. Unfamiliar readers are stimulated by more experienced readers, and seasoned readers get added value by reading, playing and discussing the texts with all in the group.
- **Competition:** The element of competition is important, because nowadays the question of win or succeed is crucial. Success in reading, understanding the text and replying to questions create a good feeling which can be transferred to reading other books and texts. Pupils who are motivated by competition gain greater interest in reading if there is a possibility to compete against others. When points, the time used to answer questions and a comparison with others are shown, reading becomes much more interesting.
- **Development:** Thinking and solving problems are trained and developed through reading and playing combined. The reader needs to understand the text in order to play the games.
- **Motivation:** Motivation to find out and learn more increases to a higher degree when the texts are processed in various ways and the playing is successful.
- **Evaluation:** Both the teacher and the reader-pupil have a possibility to evaluate results. In all learning it is important to get confirmation about knowledge. Teachers seldom have time to give everyone personal feedback, but the points a pupil gets when playing shows clear results.

The pupil does not need to share results with others, but can see how the others (anonymous) have succeeded in the game. A personal evaluation offers a possibility for **self-reflection** and analysis of **one's own studying habits and techniques** which contribute to functioning learning processes.

The gamified Easy-to-read texts created by Team Bokpil can be used in many ways to develop and evaluate knowledge and how **successful** reading is. Teachers can in addition use the games to create discussions and other activities around the books, for example to make projects on a certain theme.

5. Easy-to-read gamification, reading comprehension and memory

In the **gamified Easy-to-read texts** by Bokpil, the text gradually turns more difficult and longer. The games created for the texts aim mainly at **measuring reading comprehension and memory**. Both can be trained, but it is important to separate understanding of what has been read and mechanical reading.

Mechanical reading (perception of the text visually) might function well, but if the **understanding of what is being read** is weak it must be trained and the text perhaps read many times to grasp its meanings completely.

Important questions are among others:

- **How much** has the reader understood of the text?
- **What** has the reader understood?
- How much does the reader **remember** of what was read?
- What needs further **processing**?

Reading comprehension and memory are tested when the reader plays the games. After each chapter the reader can choose to play directly or read further and play all five language levels (1 **Easiest** to 4+ **Advanced language**) after the whole text.

At the easiest levels there are only a few questions because the texts are shorter, but from level 3 **Easy** the number of questions grow.

On Quizlet we offer **various ways** to work with the questions and results. Feedback arrives directly. The reader or pupil and teacher see immediately what is working or what requires more effort, what is difficult or easy, how the mechanical reading and understanding of words and reading comprehension function, and which aspects, linguistic, contents or others may need more **attention** and **investment in learning**.

The games on Quizlet run on time and the results are shown both as **points** and **time**. A question we have discussed much in Team Bokpil is whether it is more important to make only tasks or to play.

Our previous experiences with **Seppo** games (in Swedish), which are about reading the book and replying to questions, has shown that the model with question-reply works well.

We are excited to see when readers will beat our records.