

READING - KEY WORDS

1. Preparing to read

TASK

According to a famous study, different life events can be rated depending on the amount of stress they are likely to cause. Physiologists Holmes and Rahe worked out a system in which the most stressful events was given a value of 100 points; less stressful events were given values ranging from 99 to 1 points.

Look at the events listed and rank them from most stressful to least stressful. Compare answers with a partner.

- getting married
- changing to a new school
- divorce
- being fired from work
- going on vacation
- taking out a mortgage or loan

2. Reading

What is Stress?

The term stress has been defined in several different ways. In this discussion, we will refer to environmental stimuli or events as stressors and to emotional and physical reactions as stress.

Many sorts of events can be stressors, including disasters such as hurricanes or tornadoes, major life events such as divorce or the loss of a job, and daily hassles such as having to wait in line at the supermarket when you need to be somewhere else in ten minutes. What all these events have in common is that they interfere with our accustomed way of life.

Reacting to Stressors

The Canadian physiologist Hans Selye has proposed that both humans and other animals react to any stressor in three stages, collectively known as the general adaptation syndrome. The first stage is the alarm reaction. In this stage, the organism becomes alert and energised. After the alarm reaction comes the stage of resistance, as the organism tries to adapt to the stressful stimulus or to escape from it. If this process is successful, the state of the organism returns to normal. If not, it enters a stage of exhaustion or collapse.

In humans, however, it is difficult to predict what will be stressful to a particular person at a particular time. For one person, giving a talk in front of a class is a highly stressful stimulus. For another person, giving a talk is not threatening at all, but facing a deadline to complete a term paper is extremely stressful. Stress reactions also vary – from fear or anger to helplessness and depression.

3. After you read

3.1 HIGHLIGHTING

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Highlighting makes important information stand out so that you can find it easily when you go back to the text to study for a test. Systematically using different-coloured marker can make the review process even easier. For example, you can use one colour for key terms, another for definitions, another for names and dates, etc.

TASK

Find the key words in the text above and highlight them. Compare your answers with a partner.

3.2 BUILDING VOCABULARY

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Although there may be many words in a text that you do not know, you do not want to continually stop and look them up in a dictionary. It is often possible to get a general idea of the meaning of a word or phrase by looking at its full context. This means that you go back to the sentences that come before or that follow.

TASK

Read the following passages from the text and use the context to work out what the words in bold probably mean.

Many sorts of events can be stressors, including disasters such as hurricanes or tornadoes, major life events such as divorce or the loss of a job, and **daily hassles** such as having to wait in line at the supermarket when you need to be somewhere else in ten minutes. What all these events have **in common** is that they interfere with our **accustomed** way of life.

For one person, giving a talk in front of a class is a highly stressful stimulus. For another person, giving a talk is not **threatening** at all, but facing a deadline to complete a term paper is extremely stressful. Stress reactions also **vary** – from fear or anger to helplessness and depression.

(adapted from: Seal, B. *Academic Encounters*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.)