

**Free Voluntary Reading Wins Again, or: How Norway Can Do Even Better in Academic English Development**  
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**Substance News, 6/6/11. (substancenews.net) (slightly revised)**

**Hellekaer (2009) examined predictors of self-assessed ability to read academic texts among 578 Norwegian university students. The ability to read academic texts in Norwegian was a clear predictor ( $r = .43$ ), in agreement with claims that reading ability in the first language is related to reading ability in the second (Cummins, 1991).**

**Academic study, whether in Norwegian or English classes, was not a good predictor. Taking an extra two years of English classes at the university level increased estimates of proficiency only slightly, from 4.4 to 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 7.**

**Exposure to English media (TV, films and videos without subtitles) had a positive but modest relationship to proficiency ( $r = .30$ ).**

**The clear winner was reading for pleasure. Those who reported reading more English novels had higher proficiency ( $r = .47$ ) in reading academic English, and a combination of students' reports of their reading novels, magazines, periodicals and reading on the internet produced a slightly higher correlation,  $r = .55$ . This confirms the claim that pleasure reading provides a bridge that makes academic reading more comprehensible (Krashen, 2004).**

**Few of the students reported much reading in English: Hellekjaer provides few details, but they are compelling: Only half of the students had read 16 or more novels, and only 18% could be described as dedicated pleasure readers, reading 51 or more novels.**

**Hellekjaer concludes that "extracurricular reading is the most important predictor of academic English reading proficiency found in this study (p. 210), but the modest amount of novel reading reported suggests that Norway has not fully tapped the potential of free voluntary reading.**

**Cummins, J. 1991. Interdependence of first- and second-language proficiency in bilingual children. In *Language Processing in Bilingual Children*, E. Bialystok (Ed.) Cambridge University Press.**

**Hellekjær, Glenn Ole. 2009. Academic English reading proficiency at the university level: A Norwegian case study. *Reading in a Foreign Language* 21 (2): 198-222. (Note: Reading in a Foreign Language in an open-access journal.)**

**Krashen, S. 2004. *The Power of Reading*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.**