Chapter 5 gives examples of significant investigations into the reading of literature, including:

5.1 Researching the reading of literature: cognitive studies
5.2 Reading poetry: protocol studies
5.3 Reading stories
5.4 Affect in literary reading

• the activities and processes involved in literary reading (reading poetry; reading short stories);
• possible distinctive features of reading of literature (as opposed to reading of non-literary texts);
• relative successes and failures in reading literary texts, and possible reasons for these;
• the special circumstances of reading literature in a second or foreign language.

An over-arching point of my survey is to show that while earlier investigations into the topic were more experimentalist, researcher-controlled and psycholinguistic, today more qualitative and ecologically valid research is increasingly valued in applied linguistics and in education. Nardoccio (1992) and later researchers (see Chapter 2, ‘Expert readers’), showed that readers with advanced literary training and/or extensive experience of reading literature do indeed read differently. This chapter thus begins by considering studies of expert literature readers reading, but goes on to look also at less expert and second language readers of literature. This information should be of interest to educators in itself, but is also intended to prompt readers to further investigations of their own circumstances of literature reading and their own students’ practices and problems.
5.1 Researching the reading of literature: cognitive studies

Quotes 5.1

As soon as we begin attending to reading, it stops, or becomes something else. This seemed even more true of ‘literary reading’. Our attempts to measure it seemed to cause it to evaporate.

(Hunt 1996)

Consider next the condition in which an individual is reading pointless, incoherent, experimenter-generated text for no particular purpose. Unfortunately, this has been the typical state of affairs for the majority of the published experimental studies during the last twenty years.

(Graesser and Kreuz 1993: 156)

In a useful overview of research methods used in empirical studies of literature reading, Steen in 1991 noted the predominance of verbal reports research and strengths and weaknesses of this. It is self-evidently impossible to study reading itself, directly. Even ‘hard science’ methods from psychology or neuropsychology such as eye movement detection, or scans of electrical brain activity, blood flows, etc., are not studying ‘reading’ as such. They are studying activities involved in the reading process. Even these are subject to the kind of criticisms made in Quotes 5.1. Research into reading has too often taken the form of insensitive experimentalism, which, in the jargon, ‘lacked ecological validity’. Whatever was being studied, it was often not ‘real reading’ (‘ordinary’, ‘normal’, ‘natural reading’). Usually therefore reading has been studied as mediated or responded to, notably verbally (oral or written reports, questionnaires), or sometimes in another medium (music, dance or film inspired by a story, drawings, diagrams of poems, etc.). Increasingly the preference has been for qualitative investigation, though in principle,