

# Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension

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Comprehension strategies are conscious plans — sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of text. Comprehension strategy instruction helps students become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. These seven strategies have research-based evidence for improving text comprehension.

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## 1. Monitoring comprehension

Students who are good at monitoring their comprehension know when they understand what they read and when they do not. They have strategies to "fix" problems in their understanding as the problems arise. Research shows that instruction, even in the early grades, can help students become better at monitoring their comprehension.

Comprehension monitoring instruction teaches students to:

- Be aware of what they do understand
- Identify what they do not understand
- Use appropriate strategies to resolve problems in comprehension

## 2. Metacognition

Metacognition can be defined as "thinking about thinking." Good readers use metacognitive strategies to think about and have control over their reading. Before reading, they might clarify their purpose for reading and preview the text. During reading, they might monitor their understanding, adjusting their reading speed to fit the difficulty of the text and "fixing" any comprehension problems they have. After reading, they check their understanding of what they read.

Students may use several comprehension monitoring strategies:

- **Identify where the difficulty occurs** "I don't understand the second paragraph on page 76."
- **Identify what the difficulty is** "I don't get what the author means when she says, 'Arriving in America was a milestone in my grandmother's life.'"
- **Restate the difficult sentence or passage in their own words** "Oh, so the author means that coming to America was a very important event in her grandmother's life."
- **Look back through the text** "The author talked about Mr. McBride in Chapter 2, but I don't remember much about him. Maybe if I reread that chapter, I can figure out why he's acting this way now."
- **Look forward in the text for information that might help them to resolve the difficulty** "The text says, 'The groundwater may form a stream or pond or create a wetland. People can also bring groundwater to the surface.' Hmm, I don't understand how people can do that... Oh, the next section is called 'Wells.' I'll read this section to see if it tells how they do it."

## 3. Graphic and semantic organizers

Graphic organizers illustrate concepts and relationships between concepts in a text or using diagrams. Graphic organizers are known by different names, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters.

Regardless of the label, graphic organizers can help readers focus on

concepts and how they are related to other concepts. Graphic organizers help students read and understand textbooks and picture books.

Graphic organizers can:

- Help students focus on text structure "differences between fiction and nonfiction" as they read
- Provide students with tools they can use to examine and show relationships in a text
- Help students write well-organized summaries of a text

Here are some examples of graphic organizers:

- **Venn-Diagrams** (29K PDF)\* Used to compare or contrast information from two sources. For example, comparing two Dr. Seuss books.
- **Storyboard/Chain of Events** (29K PDF)\* Used to order or sequence events within a text. For example, listing the steps for brushing your teeth.
- **Story Map** (19K PDF)\* Used to chart the story structure. These can be organized into fiction and nonfiction text structures. For example, defining characters, setting, events, problem, resolution in a fiction story; however in a nonfiction story, main idea and details would be identified.
- **Cause/Effect** (13K PDF)\* Used to illustrate the cause and effects told within a text. For example, staying in the sun too long may lead to a painful sunburn.
- **>Find more free graphic organizers.**

## 4. Answering questions

Questions can be effective because they:

- Give students a purpose for reading
- Focus students' attention on what they are to learn
- Help students to think actively as they read
- Encourage students to monitor their comprehension
- Help students to review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know

The Question-Answer Relationship strategy (QAR) encourages students to learn how to answer questions better. Students are asked to indicate whether the information they used to answer questions about the text was textually explicit information (information that was directly stated in the text), textually implicit information (information that was implied in the text), or information entirely from the student's own background knowledge.

There are four different types of questions:

- **"Right There"** Questions found right in the text that ask students to find the one right answer located in one place as a word or a sentence in the passage. Example: Who is Frog's friend? Answer: Toad
- **"Think and Search"** Questions based on the recall of facts that can be found directly in the text. Answers are typically found in more than one place, thus requiring students to "think" and "search" through the passage to find the answer. Example: Why was Frog sad? Answer: His friend was leaving.
- **"Author and You"** Questions require students to use what they already know, with what they have learned from reading the text. Student's must understand the text and relate it to their prior knowledge before answering the question. Example: How do think Frog felt when he found Toad? Answer: I think that Frog felt happy because he had not seen Toad in a long time. I feel happy when I get to see my friend who lives far away.
- **"On Your Own"** Questions are answered based on a students prior knowledge and experiences. Reading the text may not be helpful to them when answering this type of question. Example: How would you feel if your best friend moved away? Answer: I would feel very sad if my best friend moved away because I would miss her.

## 5. Generating questions

By generating questions, students become aware of whether they can answer the questions and if they understand what they are reading. Students learn to ask themselves questions that require them to combine information from different segments of text. For example, students can be taught to ask main idea questions that relate to important information in a text.

## 6. Recognizing story structure

In story structure instruction, students learn to identify the categories of content (characters, setting, events, problem, resolution). Often, students learn to recognize story structure through the use of story maps. Instruction in story structure improves students' comprehension.

## 7. Summarizing

Summarizing requires students to determine what is important in what they are reading and to put it into their own words. Instruction in summarizing helps students:

- Identify or generate main ideas
- Connect the main or central ideas
- Eliminate unnecessary information
- Remember what they read

## Effective comprehension strategy instruction is explicit

Research shows that explicit teaching techniques are particularly effective for comprehension strategy instruction. In explicit instruction, teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modeling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and application.

- **Direct explanation** The teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy.
- **Modeling** The teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, usually by "thinking aloud" while reading the text that the students are using.
- **Guided practice** The teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy.
- **Application** The teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently.

Effective comprehension strategy instruction can be accomplished through cooperative learning, which involves students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks. Cooperative learning instruction has been used successfully to teach comprehension strategies. Students work together to understand texts, helping each other learn and apply comprehension strategies. Teachers help students learn to work in groups. Teachers also provide modeling of the comprehension strategies.