

READING COMPREHENSION ACROSS THE GRADES

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Comprehension is the goal of reading instruction.

We comprehend when we are able to combine the ideas of the author with our own background knowledge.

Comprehension is the interaction of the author's ideas and the reader's background knowledge that results in the creation or recreation of meaning.

Three factors that influence comprehension:

the reader...the background knowledge that the reader brings to the reading process influences how he or she understands the text as well as the strategies he or she knows to use while reading

the text...the author's ideas, the words the author uses to express those ideas, and how the ideas are organized and presented influences comprehension

the purpose...the reader must vary the way he or she reads according to the purpose (a recipe vs a friendly letter, vs a novel)

Strategies That Readers and Writers Use:

- tapping prior knowledge
- organizing ideas
- making connections
- using graphic organizers
- recognizing story structure
- asking and generating questions
- playing with language
- evaluating
- predicting
- figuring out unknown words
- visualizing
- applying fix-up strategies
- revising meaning
- self-monitoring
- summarizing

Comprehension skills readers use:

sequencing

categorizing

classifying

identifying fact vs opinion

noting details

recognizing genres

identifying cause and effect

comparing and contrasting

using context clues

recognizing the organization of the text

More capable readers

are fluent oral and silent readers

view reading as a process of creating meaning

decode rapidly

have large vocabularies

understand the organization of stories, plays, informational books, poems, and other texts

use a variety of strategies

monitor their level of understanding as they read

Good readers are extremely active as they read, as is apparent whenever excellent adult readers are asked to think aloud as they go through text (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Good readers are aware of why they are reading a text, gain an overview of the text before reading, make predictions about the upcoming text, read selectively based on their overview, associate ideas in text to what they already know, note whether their predictions and expectations about text content are being met, revise their prior knowledge when compelling new ideas conflicting with prior knowledge are encountered, figure out the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary based on context clues, underline and reread and make notes and paraphrase to remember important points, interpret the text, evaluate its quality, review important points as they conclude reading, and think about how ideas encountered in the text might be used in the future. Young and less skilled readers, in contrast, exhibit a lack of such activity (e.g., Cerdán & Day, 1996).

The Super Six Comprehension Strategies

by Lori Oczkus

- making connections...text to self, text to text, or text to world; this reminds me of....
- predicting/infering...using clues to predict or infer
- questioning...I am wondering; 5 W's + how; what if; would you have/have not...and why
- monitoring...does this make sense; what are the difficult ideas; how can I fix this
- summarizing/synthesizing...giving main points in order
- evaluating...agree/disagree w author's viewpoint; rate one's understanding of text; rank important ideas; rate the book

Judith Irwin's comprehension process:

- micro processes--dealing with the individual phrases and sentences
- integrative processes--understanding and inferring the relationships between clauses and sentences
- macro processing--the ongoing process of creating or selecting an organized set of summary ideas (to organize the reader's recall & reduce the number of ideas to be recalled)
- elaborative processes--making inferences that enrich and extend comprehension
- metacognitive processing--selecting, evaluating, and regulating reading comprehension strategies

Bloom's Taxonomy

Evaluation...making critical judgments
and explaining why

Synthesis...coming up with something new
based on info from text

Analysis...breaking info into simpler parts to see the
relationships among the parts

Application...using info to solve problems

Comprehension...translating, interpreting or extrapolating info

Knowledge...recall of information

QAR (Question Answer Relationships)

Students identify whether an answer to a comprehension question is:

“right there”...the answer is in text and usually easy to find; the words in the question match those in text

“think and search”...the answer is in the text, but the reader needs to put together different story parts; the words in the question and the words for the answer are not found in the same sentence-they come from different parts of the text

“on my own”...the answer is not in the text; the reader must think about what s/he knows, what the author has communicated, and how it all fits together OR the reader can answer the question without reading the text, but use his or her own experience

Improving Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension requires motivation, mental frameworks for holding ideas, concentration, and good study techniques.

Broaden one's background knowledge... by reading newspapers, magazines and books.

Know the structure of paragraphs... good writers construct paragraphs that have a beginning, middle and end. Often, the first sentence will give an overview that helps provide a framework for adding details. Also, look for transitional words, phrases or paragraphs that change the topic.

Identify the type of reasoning... does the author use cause and effect reasoning, hypothesis, model building, induction or deduction, systems thinking?

Anticipate and predict... good readers try to anticipate the author and predict future ideas and questions. If the reader is right, this reinforces his/her understanding. If the reader is wrong, s/he needs to make adjustments.

Look for the method of organization...is the material organized chronologically, serially, logically, functionally, spatially or hierarchical?

Create motivation and interest...preview material, ask questions, discuss ideas with classmates. The stronger one's interest, the greater his or her comprehension.

Pay attention to supporting cues..study pictures, graphs and headings. Read the first and last paragraph in a chapter, or the first sentence in each section.

Highlight, summarize and review...just reading a book once is not enough. To develop a deeper understanding, the reader has to highlight, paraphrase, summarize and review important ideas.

Build a good vocabulary...for most educated people, this is a lifetime project. The best way to improve one's vocabulary is to use a dictionary regularly. Keep a list of words to look up at the end of the day. Concentrate on roots, prefixes and endings.

Monitor effectiveness...good readers monitor their attention, concentration and effectiveness. They quickly recognize if they've missed an idea and backup to reread it.

Reading researchers have developed approaches to help students become active readers by teaching readers to use comprehension strategies. The following often improve both memory and comprehension of text in children:

- 1) generating questions about ideas in text while reading
- 2) constructing mental images representing ideas in the text
- 3) summarizing and paraphrasing
- 4) analyzing stories read into story grammar components of setting, characters, problems encountered by characters, attempts at solution, successful solution, and ending

(Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, Kurita, 1989).

We know a great deal about what good readers do when they read:

Good readers are active readers.

From the outset they have clear goals in mind for their reading. They constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals.

Good readers typically look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.

As they read, good readers frequently make predictions about what is to come.

They read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading—what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, what to reread, and so on.

Good readers construct, revise, and question the meanings they make as they read.

Good readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and they deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed.

They draw from, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text.

They think about the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions, historical milieu, and so on.

They monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary.

They evaluate the text's quality and value, and react to the text in a range of ways, both intellectually and emotionally.

Good readers read different kinds of text differently.

When reading narrative, good readers attend closely to the setting and characters.

When reading expository text, these readers frequently construct and revise summaries of what they have read.

For good readers, processing text occurs not only during “reading” but also during short breaks taken during reading, even after the “reading” itself has begun, and after the “reading” has ended.

Comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive.

Comprehension improves when teachers provide explicit instruction in comprehension strategies.

Bauman & Bergeron; Morrow

Cognitive strategies:

think-aloud

constructing images

summarizing

predicting and activation of prior knowledge

questioning

clarifying

text structure analysis

Interpretive strategies:

character development

imagining how a character might feel

creating themes

reading for multiple meanings

creating literal or figurative distinctions

looking for a consistent point of view

relating the text to personal experience

relating one text to another

responding to certain text features...point of view, tone, mood

Research shows:

- Discussion promotes deep understanding of text, leads to higher-levels of thinking and problem solving, and improves communication skills (Gambrell, 1996)
- Effective discussions are more likely to occur in situations where students learn discussion strategies (Raphael, et al., 1996)
- Students learn best when they engage in meaningful conversations about content. By pooling their understanding and talking about what they think they know, students emerge from instructional conversations with deeper knowledge and a clearer focus for more learning.

Based on research, a strong case can be made for doing the following in order to improve reading comprehension in students:

- teach decoding skills
- teach fluency
- teach vocabulary
- teach world knowledge
- teach specific comprehension strategies

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