

Comprehension Resources

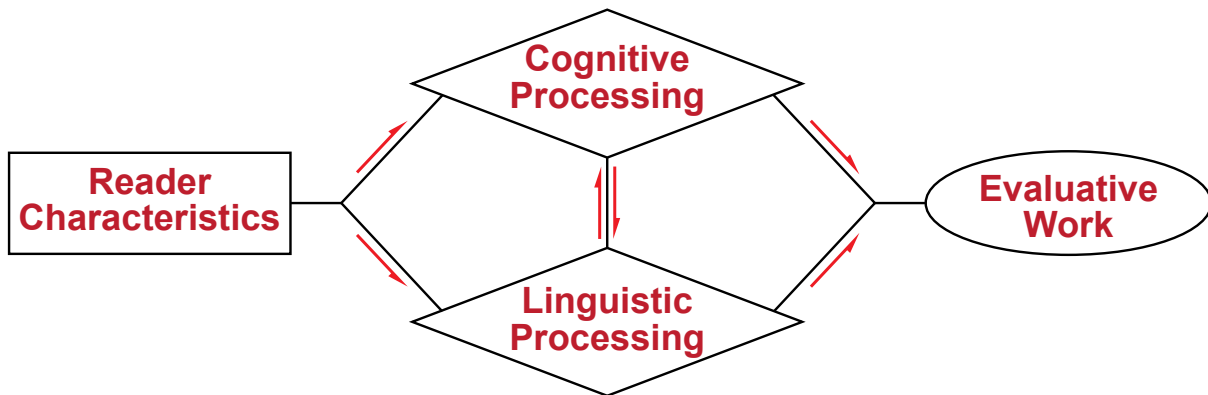
These resources were compiled to provide educators with essential foundational knowledge to support students' comprehension. The information is not meant to be comprehensive. For more information, please refer to the references. This document includes an introduction and information about:

- ▶ **What happens when a student reads**
- ▶ **Selection of text and strategy**
- ▶ **Before, during, and after reading**
- ▶ **Reteach**

What Happens When a Student Reads

Comprehension refers to the understanding of the meaning of a passage and the context in which the words occur. Comprehension occurs as a result of the interaction between the reader and the text. Before reading even begins, **reader characteristics**, such as word reading ability and vocabulary, impact the level of a student's comprehension. During reading, students depend on their **cognitive and linguistic processing abilities**, and their knowledge and skill in the use of comprehension strategies, to construct meaning. After reading, students use other **strategies** and expressive skills to demonstrate their understanding of the text.

What Happens When a Student Reads



Reader Characteristics

Readers vary in the linguistic, cognitive, and affective characteristics they bring to text.

- Linguistic competence– readers bring different levels of knowledge of word meanings (vocabulary) and syntactic awareness (grammar).
- Cognitive competence– readers vary in their memory and attention skills, their ability to make inferences, their knowledge of text structures, and their capacity to draw upon real-world experiences (i.e., prior knowledge). They also bring different level of skills in the fluent identification of words to text.
- Affective characteristics– readers vary in their attitudes toward reading and their motivation and engagement with particular genre and topics.

Cognitive Processing

Readers use cognitive processes to organize and make sense of information while reading. These mental processes, which may involve the manipulation of events, concepts, images, and/or thoughts, change throughout the reading of the text. This monitoring during reading helps the reader to analyze, interpret, and use the information from the text. Skilled readers also use a variety of strategies while reading to help improve their comprehension such as making and confirming predictions, stopping to make short summaries and reflect on meaning, and generating questions they want to answer.

Linguistic Processing

Readers use linguistic markers while reading to understand the coherence of text. These markers include their knowledge of pronoun reference, recognition of given and new information, conjunctions, verb tense, temporal ordering, and punctuation. Markers in expository text also include headers and highlighted words. This monitoring while reading helps readers mentally construct logical relationships within the text.

Evaluative Work

Readers complete activities (e.g., summarizing) to demonstrate and consolidate their understanding of the text.

Selection of Text and Strategy

To help students extract and construct meaning of written language, we provide opportunities for them to interact and engage with text, or read text, and teach them how to apply strategies when comprehension becomes difficult. All readers experience the need to apply strategies to support comprehension, including skilled readers at any age. Skilled readers may not realize when they are applying a strategy because they have become automatic and independent in applying them.

The selection of the text should be coordinated with the reading strategy you want to teach (e.g., Questioning, Summarizing). Both literary and informational (also called expository) texts should be used. **Literary texts** portray a story, or sequence of related fictional or nonfictional events involving individuals or fictional characters; in the elementary grades, narrative texts can include historical fiction, fables, and autobiographies. **Informational texts** include expository writing, pieces that argue in favor of one position or another, and procedural texts and documents. In the elementary grades, informational texts includes news articles, speeches, and timelines.

Some texts are better suited for teaching certain strategies and should be utilized for maximum student engagement. For example, when first introducing narrative text structure, use texts with obvious story grammar elements to help students more quickly identify the elements (setting, characters, problem, solution).

Both literary and informational texts are suitable for teaching:

- Predicting
- Questioning
- Sequence
- Main Idea and Supporting Details
- Retell/Summarizing
- Cause and Effect (mostly used with expository text)
- Compare and Contrast
- Description
- Problem and Solution

Before Reading

Before reading, the teacher creates a support system that helps the student to construct meaning during the reading process. This support and the reader characteristics influence how well the student integrates and comprehends the information presented in print. Although before reading activities take time, the result will be a better understanding of the text. The following are suggestions for before reading activities.

Activate Prior Knowledge and Engagement

Activating and expanding on prior knowledge and experiences related to the text increases the likelihood the student will understand and remember what they will read. To do this, teachers can:

- Preview the text in a way that promotes student interest.
- Integrate the student's prior knowledge and experiences with the text.
- Guide discussions to dispel false facts, concepts, principles, or propositions they may have of the topic.
- Make informed predictions about what may happen based on the title and illustrations.
- Provide several questions to guide the student's reading.

Features of the Text

Teachers should also identify the text genre and provide a brief description of the text structure. For example:

- **Literary Text** can be fiction that is expressed through story grammar (short stories, novels); literary non-fiction is often expressed through story grammar and provides factual information (biographies, essays, speeches); or poetry that is communicated in a more imaginative form, often involving abstract language.
- **Informational Text**, often referred to as expository text, can be persuasive or poetry. This type of text includes structural features that change according to the content of the text. The most common features of informational text are description, sequence, and/or cause and effect.

Define Difficult/Important Vocabulary

Teachers should identify vocabulary found in the text that may be unknown or confusing prior to reading. Teachers can:

- Describe language features (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, expressions) that may influence meaning.
- Define the vocabulary in “student-friendly” definitions or terms.
- Engage student in discussion of words.
- Use the words in sentences.

During Reading

During reading, the students actively monitor their thinking process to clarify, deepen, and expand their understanding of the text. They construct meaning by focusing their attention and engagement on the text, remembering key concepts, and making inferences. We want students to automatically shift and coordinate among these processes as needed while reading to verify that the text is making sense. Teachers are frequently advised to limit interruptions when reading aloud to students or when students read independently, as not to disrupt understanding. However, with difficult text, research has shown that guided discussion of important concepts or key ideas while the students are reading together can be an effective way to help students improve their understanding of the text being read and also to acquire understanding of the thinking processes that are often required to comprehend complex text.

After Reading

After reading, the activities reflect the student’s level and ability to expand on something learned from reading the text. The evaluative activities should reflect or align with the strategies taught in the before reading section. The following are suggested after reading activities.

Questioning

Effective questioning and answering should encourage deeper processing and organization of the text.

- All types of questioning and answering should be modeled by the teacher.
- Provide questioning that focuses on understanding and connecting ideas.
- Explicit questions should begin with who?, what?, when?, where? and develop into implicit questions of why?, how? and what if?
- Questioning/answering may then be used by students to self-monitor understanding while reading the text.
- Use graphic organizers, discussions, illustrations, and writing to convey understanding.

Managing Text

A deeper level of understanding occurs when a student recognizes and uses the structural elements of the text.

- Identify and discuss problem/solution, sequencing of events, main idea, and supporting details.
- Compare and contrast passage details.
- Review predictions for accuracy and amend them based on new knowledge.
- Identify and discuss cause/effect relations in informational text.
- Identify and discuss story grammar elements such as character and plot.
- Identify and discuss whether literary text is based on fact or opinion.
- Identify language features (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, expressions) that may influence meaning.
- Use graphic organizers, discussions, illustrations, and writing to convey understanding.

Summarizing the Text

When students summarize a text, they are determining the important elements of a text and putting this information into their own words.

- Examine small sections of text to determine main idea.
- Determine the main idea of the whole text (expository).
- Determine plot (literary).
- Retell what happened in the text using additional details to elaborate.
- Summarize the text.
- Use graphic organizers, discussions, illustrations, and writing to convey understanding.

References

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