

Reading Tips & Techniques



Reading Comprehension Strategies

Good readers are busy thinkers. Outlined here are the mental processes that reading experts have identified for understanding reading material. Some of these practices happen before reading, some during reading, and a few after reading. As a proficient reader, you probably do these things without thinking about them.

BEFORE READING

Activating Prior Knowledge

Activating prior knowledge is a way of getting children warmed up and ready to read. Rather than approaching a topic out of the blue, they can approach it with interest and excitement, confident that they can understand it.

What if someone handed you a college-level electrical engineering textbook, and asked you to flip to the middle and start reading? Unless you have a background in that field, chances are you'd feel pretty lost. You don't have enough prior knowledge about the subject to connect what you're reading to anything you can understand. Now suppose you were asked to read a book about frogs. You might not be a frog expert, but you probably know what one looks like. Perhaps you've even held one or owned one as a pet. Maybe you'll recall a unit on amphibians that you studied in school. You can probably name some fairy tales with frogs in them. All of this prior knowledge gives you something to build on when you start reading.

Readers' understanding of something new is always built on the foundation of something they already know. As an Instructor, you can help children think about their prior knowledge concerning a book they are going to read. The simple question, "What do you already know about this?" is often a good starting point. You could ask about children's personal experiences with something—movies or TV shows that relate to a book, or other books by the same author. In the lesson plans you will find a number of specific questions for each book to activate prior knowledge. Prior knowledge does not mean expertise; it means having some point of reference from which to start learning more.

Setting Purposes for Reading

Setting purposes for reading means giving children a reason to read a particular book. Approaching a book with a purpose in mind gives the reader something to focus on and keeps attention on the text.

You might be browsing song titles online, skimming a newspaper for movie times, or reading a magazine article. Whether it is to learn, to be entertained, to explore a new interest, to find instructions for something, or to support an idea, you have a reason for reading. If you didn't, why would you bother? Children must understand why they are reading something in order for it to be meaningful to them. You can help them identify reasons for reading a certain book; for example, because the topic is intriguing, because the pictures look interesting, because they liked other books in the same series, because they think it will help them in their lives, or even because it will make them a stronger reader, and they'll feel good about that accomplishment.

Predicting

Predicting is a way of engaging and actively thinking about a text. If readers anticipate what is going to happen, they can more easily read to confirm or contradict their predictions.

Predicting what will happen in a book takes place both before and during reading. By looking at the cover, the pictures, the table of contents, and the description on the back, you predict what the book will be about or what you will learn. As you start to read, you make predictions about what a character will do, what will happen next, and what else will be

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in the text. You will guide your group to make predictions as they read and to check and adjust their predictions as they proceed through a book.

DURING READING

Decoding Text

Decoding is being able to figure out the words and sentences of a text.

It is looking at the word *airplane* and knowing what it is by applying rules of phonics, by recognizing parts of the word, and by thinking about what would make sense in the sentence. When children are struggling with a word, you can prompt them to use these different strategies to figure it out.

Visualizing

Visualizing is forming a picture in your mind while you read. The words come to life inside your head. Strong readers form clear visual images.

You find yourself browsing through travel magazines at a newsstand. As you read, you see before you a sun-drenched beach with pristine, white sand. You turn the pages, and a gothic cathedral appears in your mind, complete with tall spires, gargoyles, and intricate stained-glass windows. You start flipping through the magazine, and you see the hubbub of a Moroccan marketplace, jammed with vendors selling olives and oranges, brightly painted pottery, and fine leather goods. Prompting children to think about what they see while reading will help them develop this skill.

Asking Questions

Again, good readers are busy thinkers. Rather than reading passively, they are constantly asking questions.

You might model such self-questioning for children by asking, *I wonder why this happened? I wonder what will happen next? Why did the author include this detail? Why is it important to know the character's background?* and so on.

Monitoring Comprehension

Monitoring comprehension means asking yourself as you read, "Does this make sense?" If it does not, a good reader will stop and try to figure out what information he or she is missing.

Have you ever stopped yourself while reading and thought, "I just read this whole paragraph and I have no idea what it said?" There could be plenty of reasons for this to happen. Good readers recognize when they do not understand the material, try to identify the reason, and fix it. As you read, the text should make sense. It should be consistent with what you already read and already know about the subject. It should fit logically with the pictures and graphics in the book.

You can guide children to often ask themselves, "Does this make sense?" If the answer is no, have them look at some of the possible reasons. Perhaps they lost their concentration, don't know some of the vocabulary, or forgot what happened earlier in the book. Maybe they don't know enough about the topic to understand the discussion of it. Or maybe they are having trouble visualizing what is going on. Once they identify the problem, they can take steps to fix it.

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AFTER READING

Summarizing and Reflecting

Good readers know what they read. They internalize and think about it. They relate what they've read to their own lives.

After reading, help children retell what happened in their own words. You can also ask them what the main idea was, and which details demonstrate it. You can encourage them to compare and contrast different facts, ideas, or characters. They can make connections between what happened in a book and something in their own lives, something in the world, or something in another book they read.

As readers become more sophisticated, they can start to think more critically about the text. They might identify the author's point of view and decide whether they agree with it. They can identify literary devices, such as figurative language, metaphor, symbolism, or irony, and understand how these affect the meaning of the text. They can decide whether information is credible. Children might stop to summarize at the end of a page or two, and at the end of a chapter as well.

Now that you are aware of the strategies for reading comprehension, try to identify them when you read. The next time you pick up a book or magazine, ask yourself:

- Why am I reading this?
- What do I already know about it?
- What do I predict it will be about?
- How does it connect to my life or something else I read?
- What do I see as I read it?
- Where do I have trouble understanding, and what do I do to solve this?
- How could I retell what I read?



By reflecting on these questions yourself, you will be more prepared to model these skills for children in your group.

