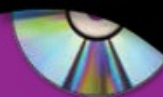




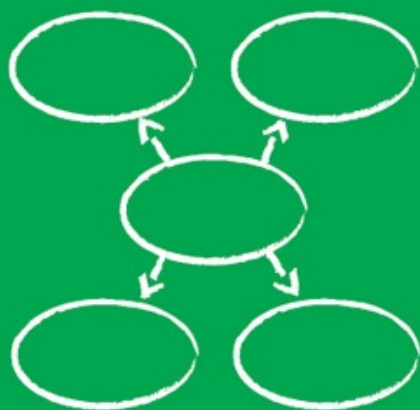
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# Successful Strategies for **Reading** in the Content Areas

**2nd Edition**



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and activities to support the strategies**

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# Table of Contents

## Introduction

How to Use This Book

Research

Correlation to Standards

## Strategies and Skills

Monitor Comprehension (including Set the Purpose and Author's Point of View)

Activate and Connect

Infer Meaning

Ask Questions

Determine Importance (including Main Idea and Supporting Details, Text Structures, Text Organizers, and Using Parts of the Book)

Visualize

Summarize and Synthesize

Developing Vocabulary

## Appendix: Works Cited



# Introduction

The saying “Every teacher is a teacher of reading” is well known but not always true. It is usually regarded as the task of the English or language arts teacher to guide students through the effective use of comprehension strategies as they read. Although students read in almost every subject area they study, content-area teachers typically overlook the need for guiding students through their textbook-based and trade book-based reading tasks. Comprehension strategies best serve students when they are employed across the curricula and in the context of their actual learning. It is only then that students can independently use the strategies successfully when reading. Students typically read literature or fictional stories for English or language arts, but they will spend the majority of their adulthood reading nonfiction, expository writing. The strategies that students use to comprehend literature are different from those they use for nonfiction. It is important to note that around grades four and five, educators see a drop in reading achievement. At this time, students seem to lose interest in reading independently, spend less time reading for pleasure, and struggle more to read the materials required of them at school. It is for this reason that all teachers at all levels must actively pursue ways to greatly enhance their students’ abilities to understand reading material, and this can be accomplished by working directly with reading comprehension strategies.

## How to Use This Book

Reading comprehension is a complex process involving interactions between the reader and the text, using multiple skills. Students need a variety of strategies to be successful readers. *Successful Strategies for Reading in the Content Areas*, 2nd Edition contains a variety of reading strategies that will help increase comprehension. This updated edition has grouped the strategies and skills to match the seven categories of strategies and skills taught in *Exploring Nonfiction: A Differentiated Content-Area Reading Program* (Teacher Created Materials Publishing 2008). An additional section, titled Developing Vocabulary, is also provided in this book. This book is divided into the following sections:

- **Monitor Comprehension** (including **Set the Purpose** and **Author’s Point of View**)
- **Activate and Connect**
- **Infer Meaning**
- **Ask Questions**
- **Determine Importance** (including **Main Idea and Supporting Details, Text**)

## **Structures, Text Organizers, and Using Parts of the Book)**

- **Visualize**
- **Summarize and Synthesize**
- **Developing Vocabulary**

Each of these eight sections contains an introduction, teaching strategies, and reproducible templates for students. Many of the teaching strategies have corresponding graphic organizers or other templates included, with page number references to direct you to the correct reproducible page. It is important to read the introduction to each section before using the strategies to understand how best to teach these important nonfiction skills. For further information, and to understand the research about reading comprehension and content-area reading, read the rest of this introduction. You will also find a Correlation to Standards chart (pages 15–16) showing the national standards to which each strategy is aligned. A CD is provided at the back of this book with all of the graphic organizers and templates in PDF format so you can print them. Most of these pages are also provided in Microsoft Word so that they can be modified. An index of these pages is provided on the CD.

This book provides a wealth of information about content-area reading strategies and skills that can be used with any nonfiction text. The strategies and skills can also be used in conjunction with *Exploring Nonfiction: A Differentiated Content-Area Reading Program* as a resource guide to support the lesson plans. Refer to the Works Cited (page 279) for a list of references used to create this book.

## **Research: Explicit Instruction of Reading Comprehension Strategies**

If content-area teachers were asked how they improve their students' reading skills, the majority would most likely struggle to answer the question. Good teachers use many strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension, and it is helpful to identify which strategies they use in order to explain why the techniques successfully improve their students' skills. Even more important is the explicit instruction of the individual strategies, including modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. These steps ensure that students learn to independently and consistently use a wide variety of reading comprehension strategies for a broad range of reading experiences.

Teaching students the strategies to improve their comprehension is nothing new to educators. Extensive research has demonstrated that students greatly benefit from the direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies when reading a text (Duke and Pearson 2002; Block 1999; Dole, Brown, and Trathen 1996; Durkin 1978; Pressley and Afflerbach 1995, as cited by Kragler, Walker, and Martin 2005). Simply put, strategy instruction is an effective means of assisting students in improving comprehension and understanding. This book, *Successful Strategies for Reading in the Content Areas*, 2nd Edition, is designed to give content-area teachers tools for teaching reading

comprehension strategies.

## **Research: Which Strategies to Teach**

The National Reading Panel Report (2000), commissioned by the U.S. Congress to evaluate research in the area of reading, identified a number of effective comprehension strategies. Pressley (2000) echoes these findings. These strategies include vocabulary development, prediction skills (including inference), the building of prior knowledge, think alouds, visual representations, summarization, and questioning. This book provides an explanation of these strategies and describes a number of activities that content-area teachers can incorporate into their lessons. These findings guide the selection of strategies included in *Successful Strategies for Reading in the Content Areas*.

Students also need to develop their metacognitive skills when reading and learning. Scholars agree that metacognition plays a significant role in reading comprehension (Baker and Brown 1984; Garner 1987; Mastropieri and Scruggs 1997; Paris, Wasik, and Turner 1991; Schraw 1998, as cited by Baker 2002). Research shows that teachers should foster metacognition and comprehension monitoring during comprehension instruction because students will be able to monitor and self-regulate their abilities to read.

“Developing engaged readers involves helping students to become both strategic and aware of the strategies they use to read” (McCarthy, Hoffman, and Galda 1999, as cited by Baker 2002).

It is important to note that teachers should never take a “one size fits all” approach when teaching reading comprehension. Some strategies work for some students, and other strategies work for other students, just as some strategies work best with certain types of reading material, and other strategies work best with other types of reading material. The most important thing to remember when trying to improve reading comprehension in students is that the skill level, group dynamic, and makeup of the students should determine the approach to take.

## **Research: The Steps Involved in Explicit Instruction of Reading Comprehension Strategies**

According to Duke and Pearson (2002), research supports that a balanced approach to teaching reading comprehension is more than teaching students specific reading strategies and providing opportunities to read. Teachers should begin with direct explanation and instruction of how to use the strategies so that after a series of steps, students will be able to use the strategies independently. The following are the five steps for explicit instruction of comprehension strategies:

### **1. Provide an exact description of the strategy and explain when and how it should be used.**

Teachers need to explain what the strategy is called, why students should use it, what it helps them understand, and how often students should use it.

2. **Provide modeling of the strategy.** Teachers should model how to use the strategy when students are in the process of reading. Students can also model the strategy while the teacher reinforces an explanation of how the strategy is being used.
3. **Provide opportunities for collaborative use of the strategy in action.** Teachers and students should work together and share their use of the strategy while they are reading.
4. **Lead guided practice sessions using the strategy, and allow for a gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the student.** At this stage, teachers can remind students of how to use the strategy and of the steps involved, but teachers should allow students to work on the technique independently.
5. **Encourage students' independent use of the strategy.** In the final stage, teachers might gently remind students of the name of the strategy, but the students should be using the technique automatically and independently.

Duke and Pearson (2002) emphasize the importance of remembering that students need to be able to use more than one comprehension strategy to understand a reading selection. Throughout the five phases, other strategies should be referenced and modeled for the students. When working with reading materials in any content area, teachers should use the very same techniques to introduce a new learning strategy to students as they would during language arts or in an English class. Research shows that students can master the use of reading comprehension strategies when instruction follows the five steps listed above. When covering any topic, teachers must take the time to allow students to master the strategy so that they can become independent readers. Follow these steps with the strategies in this book, and students will improve their comprehension.

## **Research: What Great Teachers Do**

Many content-area teachers use a variety of strategies that go beyond simply answering the questions at the end of the chapter. Research shows, however, that there is a big difference between teaching reading comprehension strategies well and teaching them in a dynamic, ingenious way that motivates and excites students about reading and learning. Through research, observations, and conversations with teachers who have been successful with the direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies, Keene (2002) has identified five traits specific to outstanding and consistently effective teachers. What makes these teachers effective?

1. **They take the time to understand each strategy in their own reading.** Reading about the techniques and activities is not enough. Great teachers of reading comprehension strategies take the time to figure out how to use and understand every strategy with the texts they are reading. In doing so, they increase their own metacognitive skills and can better articulate their own thinking during reading.
2. **They incorporate reading comprehension strategy instruction into predictable**

**daily, weekly, and monthly activities.** Effective teachers of reading comprehension strategies set goals for strategy learning and create a predictable schedule to ensure that those goals are met. These teachers also set aside time to work more intensively with small groups as needed. They also set aside time for students to reflect on their progress toward the goals they set.

3. **They ask students to apply each comprehension strategy to a wide variety of texts and text levels in different contexts.** Great teachers use beautifully written texts with challenging and profound themes that can be read in their entirety in a mini-lesson. For example, they ask students to summarize a textbook and a short story, use sensory images in poetry and expository essays, and use background knowledge to understand a biography and the letters to the editor. In order to comprehend actively and assertively, students must read texts with appropriately challenging words and concepts.

4. **They vary the size of groupings for strategy instruction.** Changing the group size and configuration helps teachers focus on different goals during comprehension-strategy instruction.

**Large groups are best for:**

- introducing a new strategy
- modeling think alouds to show students how good readers use the strategy
- practicing think alouds with new genres, and allowing students to share their experiences using the strategy

**Small groups are best for:**

- providing more intensive instruction for students who need it
- introducing gifted students to the strategy so that they can apply it independently to more challenging texts and new genres
- introducing new activities that enable students to share their thinking (maps, charts, thinking notebooks, sketches, logs, etc.)
- allowing students to discuss books and comprehension strategies without teacher involvement

**Conferences are best for:**

- checking a student's understanding of how to apply the strategy he or she is studying to his or her own books
- providing intensive strategy instruction for a text that may be particularly challenging to a student
- coaching a student in how he or she might reveal his or her thinking to others
- pushing a student to use a strategy to think more deeply than he or she might have imagined possible



5. **They gradually release the responsibility for the application of a comprehension strategy to the students.** Great teachers follow the steps involved in the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies (Duke and Pearson 2002): over several weeks, teachers provide thorough explanations of the strategy, model how to use it, allow for group work with the strategy, transition to more independent use, and then release the responsibility to the students.

By following these guidelines for the teacher and using the strategies in this book, students will be provided with rich and meaningful opportunities for comprehension instruction.

## **Research: What Do Good Readers Do When They Read?**

Duke and Pearson (2002) have established that good readers:

- read actively
- set goals for their reading tasks and constantly evaluate whether the text and their reading of it is meeting their goals
- preview the text prior to reading, noting the text organization and structure in order to locate the sections most relevant to their reading goals
- make predictions about what is to come in the text
- read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading process: what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what to skim, what not to read, and what to reread
- construct, revise, and question the meanings they develop as they read
- determine the meanings of unfamiliar or unknown words and concepts in the text
- draw from, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with the material in the text
- consider the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions, historical perspectives, and so on
- monitor their understanding of the text, make adjustments in their reading as necessary, and deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed
- evaluate the text's quality and value, and interact with the text both intellectually and emotionally
- read different kinds of texts differently
- construct and revise summaries of what they have read when reading expository texts
- think about the text before, during, and after reading
- feel satisfied and productive when reading, even though comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity

Content-area teachers can easily incorporate the same techniques that language arts teachers have used for years to help students become more strategic and skilled readers and to help them comprehend the materials they encounter. Teachers will find the job of using the textbook much easier if every student has the skills of a good reader.

Opportunities for all of the activities above are provided in the strategies listed throughout this book.

## **Research: The Reading Process**

Teachers need to understand the steps of the reading process in order to help students improve their reading comprehension skills. Content-area teachers can easily optimize the use of reading materials with students by utilizing the three-part framework of the reading process to facilitate learning. Break reading assignments into three comprehension-building steps: before reading, during reading, and after reading (Pressley 2002). It is important to note that what teachers do during each stage of the reading process is crucial to their students' learning.

### **Before Reading**

Prior to beginning a reading assignment, engage in a variety of activities in the hopes of reducing any uncertainty involved in the reading task. These activities include generating interest in the topic, building and activating prior knowledge, and setting a purpose for reading.

Teachers who motivate students and create interest prior to assigning the reading improve their students' overall comprehension. Students who are more motivated to read are more engaged and actively involved in the process of learning than those who are not motivated. Motivated readers are also more likely to have better long-term recall of what they read.

Teachers can motivate students by assessing their prior knowledge. Knowing students' background knowledge on a topic makes it easier to build on and activate that knowledge during reading. The mind holds information in the form of frameworks called *schemata*, and as we learn new information, we store it in a framework of what we already know. Teachers who build on and activate students' prior knowledge before reading prepare students to more efficiently comprehend the material that they will be reading.

Prior to reading, teachers should prepare students to read by setting a purpose for the reading task. There are a number of different purposes a student can have for a reading assignment: predict what will happen, learn new vocabulary, summarize the information, evaluate the author's point of view, and so on. Students need to know what their purpose is as they read because it helps them to focus their efforts. In doing so, teachers can guide the students' search for meaning as they read.

Teachers should also take the time to introduce key concepts and vocabulary prior to reading. In doing so, they help the students read the selection more fluently, with greater automaticity, and with greater comprehension—all of which lead to greater recall of the information.

Finally, teachers should establish in their students a metacognitive awareness for the task

of reading. Students should be prompted to be aware of what they are thinking and doing as they are reading. Developing metacognitive awareness allows students to better understand the strategies necessary for effective learning. It also enables students to take control of their own learning, making them more independent readers and learners.

## **During Reading**

During reading, students are actively reading text aloud or silently. During this stage of the reading process, students are engaged in answering questions (either self-generated or teacher-generated), monitoring their comprehension of the text, clarifying the purpose of reading, visualizing the information, and building connections.

Most often, students are engaged in answering questions while they read. Proficient readers self-question as they read to make sure they understand the reading material. In addition, students search for the answers to questions they may have generated prior to reading. As students process the text, they begin to infer what the author intended, and they begin to generalize about the specific details in the information provided. They also look for support for the predictions they have made.

Students are involved in monitoring and regulating their reading abilities while they are actively reading. If a section of the text is confusing, students need to know that they can reread the section, use fix-up strategies to help them understand what they are puzzled by, or adjust the speed of reading to suit their purposes and the difficulty of the text. Thus, students must monitor their own reading strategies and make modifications as needed.

In addition to monitoring their reading abilities, students are also figuring out words as they actively read. If they do not know what a word means, they use the context clues or word parts to decode the meaning of the word. As students attend to vocabulary needs, they also observe the text structure and features as they read, which helps them organize the new information.

During reading, teachers can focus students' attention on the objectives of the reading task. Students may adjust their purposes for reading based on the information they are reading and on their prior knowledge.

Proficient readers actively work to create images in their minds that represent the concepts in the reading material. Teachers should engage the students in creating mental images to help them comprehend the material as they are reading. This promotes greater recall of the information and engages the students in the reading process.

While students are reading, they are in the process of connecting the new information they are learning to their existing schemata. Therefore, teachers should be actively involved in helping students make connections between what they already know and what they are learning. This prepares them for the synthesis of the information. Teachers can be instrumental in helping students relate to the material.

## **After Reading**

Students expand their understanding of the material after reading the text. During the final stage of the reading process, students build connections among the bits of information that

they have read, enabling them to deepen their understanding and reflect on what they have learned.

After reading, students need the teacher to guide them through follow-up exercises so they can reflect on what they have read. During reflection, students can contemplate the new information, clarify new ideas, refine their thinking, and connect what they have learned to other ideas to synthesize the new information. Teachers should spend time revisiting the text with students to demonstrate that the reading experience is not a single event.

Also, students generally find the main idea and distinguish the most important ideas from less important ideas. This enables them to prioritize and summarize what they have read.

After reading, teachers generally assess what students have learned. Students answer questions about what they have learned, and teachers generally use their answers to determine whether the students can move on or need additional instruction. Teachers can take advantage of additional activities for after reading to deepen students' comprehension of the text.

After students have read, they are able to engage in higher-level thinking tasks. Students can use critical thinking to evaluate the quality or validity of the material, or they can synthesize what they have learned by integrating their new knowledge with their prior knowledge. They can also analyze what they have read by closely examining the text characteristics specific to the genre.

## **Correlation to Standards**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation mandates that all states adopt academic standards that identify the skills students will learn in kindergarten through grade 12. While many states had already adopted academic standards prior to NCLB, the legislation set requirements to ensure the standards were detailed and comprehensive.

Standards are designed to focus instruction and guide adoption of curricula. Standards are statements that describe the criteria necessary for students to meet specific academic goals. They define the knowledge, skills, and content students should acquire at each level. Standards are also used to develop standardized tests to evaluate students' academic progress.

In many states today, teachers are required to demonstrate how their lessons meet state standards. State standards are used in the development of Shell Education products, so educators can be assured that they meet the academic requirements of each state.

## **How to Find Your State Correlations**

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