**14. TECHNIQUES OF CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF A TEXT**

(BASIC) Understanding the precise meaning of a text with 5-step technique

You do not have to understand every text to the last detail. However, when you must (or want to) thoroughly understand a text (e.g., for a test or a presentation), the 5-step reading technique will be an outstanding help. It functions as follows:

**Step 1  
Skim over the text to get an overview.**

The goal is to obtain a rough overview of the text. For that, you must read all titles and all subtitles, look at the illustrations and look into the individual sections. With books: read the summary on the back cover or on the first inside page, read the table of contents, and look through the preface or the introduction.

**Step 2  
Ask questions about the text.**

What would you like to know about the topic of the text, what interests you? What do you know already? Write your questions on a sheet of paper and leave space for further questions.

**Step 3  
Now read the text thoroughly.**

Read the entire text in a concentrated manner. You can divide longer texts or books into shorter portions that you can manage (sections, pages, and chapters). After each portion, refer to your questions from step 2, and think about what you can already answer by now. Perhaps you can add additional questions or mark an important passage already.

**Step 4  
Mark anything important, answer the questions and summarize the text.**

a) When you have read the text, review your questions from step 2 and 3 and answer them if possible.

b) Mark anything of importance in the text (by underlining or highlighting; with a line or notes in the margin of the page). Use pencil, sticky notes or paper slips for books which you are not allowed to mark up.

c) Create a summary of the text in your own words. It will help you to accurately think through the content of the text one more ti

**Step 5  
Repeat the content.**

One or two days later: review the text with the markings from step 4b one more time. Try to summarize and represent the content in your head or on a piece of paper as completely as possible. Check and compare with the original to see if you have not omitted anything.

(ADVANCED) Teach the Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers

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To improve students’ reading comprehension, teachers should introduce the seven cognitive strategies of effective readers: activating, inferring, monitoring-clarifying, questioning, searching-selecting, summarizing, and visualizing-organizing. This article includes definitions of the seven strategies and a lesson-plan template for teaching each one.

*To assume that one can simply have students memorize and routinely execute a set of strategies is to misconceive the nature of strategic processing or executive control. Such rote applications of these procedures represents, in essence, a true oxymoron-non-strategic strategic processing.*

*— Alexander and Murphy (1998, p. 33)*

If the struggling readers in your content classroom routinely miss the point when “reading” content text, consider teaching them one or more of the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers. Cognitive strategies are the mental processes used by skilled readers to extract and construct meaning from text and to create knowledge structures in long-term memory. When these strategies are directly taught to and modeled for struggling readers, their comprehension and retention improve.

Struggling students often mistakenly believe they are reading when they are actually engaged in what researchers call *mindless reading* (Schooler, Reichle, & Halpern, 2004), zoning out while staring at the printed page. The opposite of mindless reading is the processing of text by highly effective readers using cognitive strategies. These strategies are described in a fascinating qualitative study that asked expert readers to think aloud regarding what was happening in their minds while they were reading. The lengthy scripts recording these spoken thoughts (i.e., think-alouds) are called *verbal protocols* (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). These protocols were categorized and analyzed by researchers to answer specific questions, such as, What is the influence of prior knowledge on expert readers’ strategies as they determine the main idea of a text? (Afflerbach, 1990b).

The protocols provide accurate “snapshots” and even “videos” of the ever-changing mental landscape that expert readers construct during reading. Researchers have concluded that reading is “constructively responsive-that is, good readers are always changing their processing in response to the text they are reading” (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, p. 2). Instructional Aid 1.1 defines the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers, and Instructional Aid 1.2 provides a lesson plan template for teaching a cognitive strategy.

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| Instructional Aid 1.1: Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers | |
| *Strategy* | *Definition* |
| Activating | "Priming the cognitive pump" in order to recall relevent prior knowledge and experiences from long-term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from text |
| Inferring | Bringing together what is spoken (written) in the text, what is unspoker (unwritten) in the text, and what is already knowen by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text |
| Monitoring-Clarifying | Thinking about how and what one is reading, both during and after the act of reading, for purposes of determining if one is comprehending the text combined with the ability to clarify and fix up any mix-ups |
| Questioning | Engaging in learning dialogues with text (authors), peers, and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering |
| Searching-Selecting | Searching a variety of sources in order to select appropriate information to answer questions, define words and terms, clarify misunderstandings, solve problems, or gather information. |
| Summarizing | Restating the meaning of text in one's own words--different words from those used in the original text |
| Visualizing-Organizing | Constructing a mental image or graphic organizer for the purpose of extracting and constructing meaning from the text |

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| Instructional Aid 1.2: A Lesson Template for Teaching Cognitive Strategies | | |
| *Steps* | *Teacher Script* | |
| 1. Provide direct instruction regarding the cognitive strategy |  | |
| a. Define and explain the strategy. |  | |
| b. Explain the purpose the strategy serves during reading |  | |
| c. Describe the critical attributes of the strategy. |  | |
| d. Provide concrete examples/nonexamples of the strategy. |  | |
| 2. Model the strategy by thinking aloud. |  | |
| 3. Facilitate guided practice with students. |  | |
| Instructional Aid 1.3: A Lesson Template for Teaching Summarizing | | | |
| *Lesson Template for Teaching Cognitive Strategies* | | *Lesson Plan for Teaching Summarizing* | |
| 1. Provide direct instruction regarding the cognitive strategy | |  | |
| a. Define and explain the strategy. | | *Summarizing* is restating in your own words the meaning of what you have read-- using different words from those used in the original text--either in written form or a graphic representation (picture of graphic organizer). | |
| b. Explain the purpose the strategy serves during reading | | Summarizing enables a reader to determine what is most imporant to remember once the reading is completed. Many things we reade have only one or two bid ideas, and it's important to identify them and restate them for purposed of retention. | |
| c. Describe the critical attributes of the strategy. | | A summary has the following characteristics. It  Is short  Is to the point, containing the big idea of the text  Omits trivial information and collapses lists into a word or phrase Is not a retelling or a "photocopy" of the text | |
| d. Provide concrete examples/nonexamples of the strategy. | | Examples of good summaries might inlude the one-sentence book summaries from *The New York Times* Bestsellers List, an obituary of a famous person, or a report of a basketball or football game that captures the highlights.  The mistakes that students commonly make when writing summaries can be more readily avoided by showing students excellent nonexamples (e.g., a paragraph that is too long, has far too many details, or is a complete retelling of the text rather than a statement of the main idea. | |
| 2. Model the strategy by thinking aloud. | | *Thinking aloud* is a metacognitive activity in which teachers reflect on their behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes regarding what they have read and then speak their thoughts aloud for students. Choose a section of relatively easy text from your discipline and think aloud as you read it, and then also think aloud about how you would go about summarizing it--then do it. | |
| 3. Facilitate guided practice with students. | | Using easy-to-read content text, read aloud and generate a summary together with the whole class.  Using easy-to-read content text, ask students to read with partners and create a summary together.  One students are writing good summaries as partners, assign text and expect students to read it and generate summaries independently. | |

References

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