**What is reading comprehension?**

Reading comprehension is simply the ability to understand what you read. Strong reading comprehension typically encompasses a variety of literacy skills needed to interpret and identify meanings within a text. Several elements like fluency, the ability to decode unfamiliar vocabulary and using context clues from the reading to identify key features of a text can all be components of effective reading comprehension.

* **Fluency**
* **Vocabulary**
* **Inference**
* **Retention**

**Fluency**

Fluency refers to a mix of different factors. First, it focuses on your ability to read clearly with flow. Fluency also focuses on your ability to decode new vocabulary quickly while reading. Fluency is what it sounds like to read, which can directly impact your ability to comprehend what you read. For example, as a child becomes more fluent in their reading, they will be able to quickly find meaning and an understanding of what they read, which contributes to understanding the text.

**Vocabulary**

The ability to decode or determine the meaning of new words can also influence your reading comprehension. When you can quickly interpret new meanings and identify relationships between new vocabulary and familiar terms, you can increase your ability to make assumptions, form ideas and generally better understand the texts you read.

**Inference**

Inference is also a key element of reading comprehension. When we make inferences, we are connecting information from texts to our own ideas and opinions that help us identify the meaning of what we read. For instance, when reading an article about plastics in the oceans, you might make an inference that to reduce the amount of plastic waste you should recycle. Inferring happens when we read a text where the purpose and meaning of the text is not implicitly stated. Additionally, the ability to connect ideas and make inferences can help increase retention.

**Retention**

Reading comprehension is typically all about retaining what we read. Comprehension is based on the retention of information, and by practicing your summarizing skills and remembering what you have read, you can further strengthen your reading comprehension.

**How to improve your reading skills**

There are a variety of ways you might improve your reading skills. You might practice speed reading to improve your fluency or make notes each time you encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. The following steps also help outline what you might do to improve and further develop your reading skills.

1. Set aside time to read each day.
2. Set reading goals.
3. Preview the texts you read.
4. Determine the purpose.
5. Apply key reading strategies.
6. Take notes while you read.
7. Apply what you read by summarizing.

**1. Set aside time to read each day.**

One of the most effective ways to build your skills is to practice. Developing your reading skills will ultimately take practice, and you can set aside 10 to 15 minutes each day to read. You can read news articles, fiction, magazine issues or any kind of text, as long as you are taking the time to practice your reading skills.

**2. Set reading goals.**

You can set reading goals for yourself to help you develop a wider vocabulary, gain a deeper understanding of different texts and improve your ability to make connections between things you read and your own perspectives and ideas.

For example, you might set a goal to learn different vocabulary related to a central topic like business management, technology or another subject that interests you. Then, you can find meanings to unfamiliar words that help to build your vocabulary as you read. As you build your vocabulary to higher-level words and phrases, you can increase the difficulty level of the texts you read.

**3. Preview the texts you read.**

Previewing and scanning over texts can be another step toward improving your reading skills. You can apply this strategy by previewing titles, captions, headlines and other text features to get an idea of what you are reading about. This can help you form central ideas about the text before you begin reading it.

**4. Determine the purpose.**

As you read through different texts, practice determining the purpose. Think about why various texts were written and what meanings or themes can be understood from a text. Additionally, you might identify the purpose that you are reading for, such as to find information, follow instructions in a manual or to enjoy a story. Knowing your purpose for reading a text can help you look for key ideas and details that support your purpose.

**5. Apply key reading strategies.**

As you read different texts, you can apply several key strategies to help you increase your comprehension. For instance, when previewing a text, you might identify the text structure as informational, persuasive or instructional. You might also determine key elements of different texts like the central themes, problems and solutions or comparative ideas presented in what you read. Using strategies like identifying text features, determining the purpose and taking notes can all work to help you improve your reading skills.

**6. Take notes while you read.**

Another highly effective method for improving your reading skills is to take notes while you read. For instance, you might take notes while reading a fiction novel to gain a deeper understanding of the author's choice of language, or you might write down new vocabulary while reading a science journal. Effective note-taking can prompt you to ask questions about and make connections to what you read.

Similarly, creating visual representations like charts, tables or diagrams can clarify themes and ideas and can help you form inferences from your reading. Note-taking can be highly beneficial for comprehension exercises like summarizing, too.

**7. Apply what you read by summarizing.**

Summarizing what you read can also improve your reading skills. Summarizing forces you to remember specific details and central topics about what you read in your own words and through your own unique perspective. You might try verbally summarizing what you read by sharing information with a friend or write a short summary to help you retain and comprehend what you read.

As you develop your reading skills, your communication and overall ability to interact with others and perform in your career can develop as well.