**Inferences**

**What Is It?**

Making an inference involves using what you know to make a guess about what you don't know or reading between the lines. Readers who make inferences use the clues in the text along with their own experiences to help them figure out what is not directly said, making the text personal and memorable. Helping students make texts memorable will help them gain more personal pleasure from reading, read the text more critically, and remember and apply what they have read.

**Why Is It Important?**

Researchers have confirmed that thoughtful, active, proficient readers are metacognitive; they think about their own thinking during reading. They can identify when and why the meaning of the text is unclear to them and can use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or deepen their understanding of a text (Duffy et al. 1987).

Proficient readers use their [**prior knowledge**](https://www.teachervision.com/reading-comprehension/activating-prior-knowledge) and textual information to draw conclusions, make critical judgments, and form unique interpretations from text. Inferences may occur in the form of conclusions, predictions, or new ideas (Anderson and Pearson, 1984).

**How Can You Make It Happen?**

Introduce this strategy by modeling it for students, starting with everyday examples, moving to listening activities, and then to text examples. Tell students that good readers make inferences to understand what they are reading. Emphasize that they will bring their own knowledge of events to the text, so each inference may be unique. For example, you may want to introduce making inferences with an example such as the following.

You got to school this morning and you couldn't find a lesson plan. You were reading it over while having breakfast, so you probably left it on your kitchen table.

Point out that you are making an inference based upon the fact that you know you were working on your [**lesson plan**](https://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans) at home. Discuss situations in which students don't have all of the information and have to make logical guesses, such as figuring out what someone is trying to say, figuring out what is happening in a movie, or figuring who the singer is on the radio. They may need practice identifying the inferences they make in every day life.

Another way to introduce this strategy is to use pictures from a magazine or book cover, and cover a part of the picture. Ask about what is happening in the picture, what the picture is advertising, or what the story will be about. Think aloud as you make connections between the facts and your [**prior knowledge**](https://www.teachervision.com/reading-comprehension/activating-prior-knowledge), using phrases such as, "The picture looks like...I know that..." Next, have students respond to questions about new pictures, citing their reasons for their inferences. Have them cite reasons that are facts along with reason that come from their prior knowledge.

Then, model how good readers make inferences while reading. They use ideas from the book and add their own ideas to them. Read this short passage to students:

The young woman walked a bit hesitantly towards the famous cozy Italian restaurant. She did not believe the excuse her parents gave her for having to meet her at the restaurant instead of at their house. To make matters worse, she was a bit grumpy because she was still catching up on the sleep that she lost during exam time. She noticed some cars that looked familiar in the parking lot. As soon as she walked through the door, she heard, "Surprise!"

Now read it again and when you make an inference, tell students about it and describe how you make the inferences. You may say something such as:

**The text says:** She did not believe the excuse her parents gave her.  
**I know:** Sometimes if people play practical jokes, others don't believe everything they say. Maybe her parents played practical jokes.

**The text says:** She was a bit grumpy because she was still catching up on the sleep that she lost during exam time.  
**I know:** I know exams are usually given in school, so she is probably in high school or college.

**The text says:** She noticed some cars that looked familiar in the parking lot. As soon as she walked through the door, she heard, "Surprise!"  
**I know:** If the cars are familiar, that means people she knows are in the restaurant. This makes me change my inference. If her parents wanted to meet her at the restaurant, and other people she knows are there, maybe it's a surprise party.

By modeling your thought process, students can see how you took the information from the text, along with what you knew already and your own ideas, to make inferences. Point out which facts came from the text and which came from your background knowledge. Then put them all together to make the inference that it might be a surprise party.

To make the process more explicit, use a [**graphic organizer**](https://www.teachervision.com/lesson-planning/graphic-organizer) to record students' answers. Ask students to record the facts that are stated in the text, along with their background knowledge. Have students keep in mind that they can change or modify their inferences as they read. Point out that they were able to make an inference based on their knowledge of surprise parties. Have students practice this strategy and use a graphic organizer while reading text.