

Chapter 5: Comprehension: Part 1

The central factor in reading is comprehension. Since reading is an interactive process that involves the information brought to the text by readers, the information supplied by the text, and the reading situation, good comprehension depends on many factors. Among them are readers' backgrounds of experience, sensory and perceptual abilities, thinking abilities, and word recognition strategies, as well as their purposes for reading, their audience for the reading, the importance of the reading to them, and their facility with various comprehension strategies that will help them unlock the meanings within the text. Children's schemata, built through background experiences, aid comprehension of printed material and are themselves modified by input from this material.

Having a purpose for reading enhances comprehension. Teachers should learn how to set good purposes for children's reading assignments and discover how to help them learn to set their own purposes.

The audience for reading affects the reading strategies used. The audience may be the reader himself or herself, the teacher, or other children.

The importance the reading has for the reader is also a factor. High-risk reading for a test may be done differently from low-risk reading in the classroom setting.

Features of the text itself also affect comprehension. Sentences that are complex, contain relative clauses, are in the passive voice, have missing words, or express negation may need special attention because students may have difficulty comprehending them. The meaning conveyed by punctuation in sentences should receive attention. Students also need help in understanding the functions of paragraphs and the organizational patterns of paragraphs and whole selections.

Prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities can foster children's comprehension of reading selections. Prereading activities such as previews, anticipation guides, semantic mapping, writing before reading, and creative drama can be helpful. Metacognitive strategies, questioning, and the cloze procedure are among the techniques that can be used during reading. Postreading activities usually involve questioning, making visual representations, using readers' theater, retelling, and application of concepts. Some activities—such as discussion, the K-W-L procedure, semantic webbing and story mapping, story grammar and story frame activities, other story structure techniques, writing activities related to reading, and educational television—may be involved in prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities at various times.