

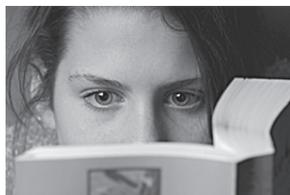


TACKLING TEXT

TEACHING UPPER ELEMENTARY
AND SECONDARY STUDENTS
TO 'READ TO LEARN'



Most effective readers engage in a mental dialogue with the text. It's a thoughtful and deliberate process.



The single most significant factor in determining secondary and post-secondary academic success is the ability to read and comprehend expository texts. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), the ability to read is a key predictor of achievement in mathematics. History-social science and science courses use textbooks as primary instructional tools—and then there's the obvious connection between reading and language arts achievement.

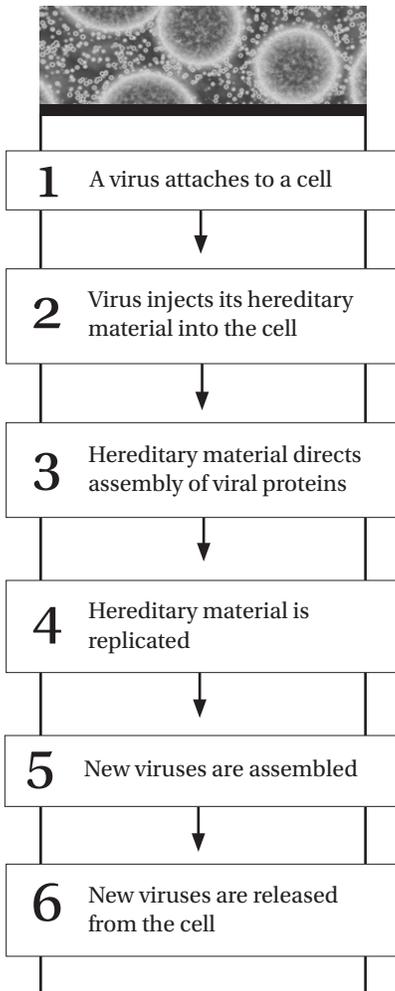
Reading to learn is an active process that requires students to simultaneously extract and construct meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Most effective readers engage in a mental dialogue with the text—asking questions, rereading confusing passages, and applying prior knowledge to new material. It's a thoughtful and deliberate process.

But how do we get students engaged in this kind of reading? Many have already “learned” that reading is hard, boring, and unproductive. If that's the case, it's probably because they don't know how to interact with their texts.

The good news is that reading comprehension can be improved by teaching students the strategies and dispositions of skillful readers. Upper elementary, middle, and high school teachers *can* counteract reading deficits.

In this issue of the Bulletin, SCOE language arts specialist Lynn Fitzpatrick provides ideas for what teachers can do before, during, and after a lesson to enhance reading comprehension and empower students to become independent consumers of text.

DELIBERATELY PLAN TO ENHANCE READING COMPREHENSION



A Flow Map provides an effective note-taking format for expository texts that describe a chronological sequence.



This Bridge Map shows the relationship between vocabulary words and the concepts they represent for students studying the U.S. Constitution.

Relating factor	Preamble	Articles	Amendments	Bill of Rights
Purpose of the document	Establish the goals of the Constitution	Create balance of power	Make the Constitution a "living document"	Maintain individual & state rights

Many steps in the lesson planning process directly impact students' ability and willingness to comprehend texts, which means that teachers must begin to address the reading dilemma as they are *preparing* to teach.

According to Dr. Kevin Feldman, SCOE's director of reading, "The single biggest predictor of reading comprehension is what you already know about the topic, so preparing students by activating background knowledge is key. Teachers may want to allocate 65 percent of their instructional time to 'front-loading' instruction—that is, spending time on vocabulary development, building background knowledge, and explicitly teaching strategies for actively engaging with text."

When teachers plan activities with reading comprehension in mind, students benefit. Here are some key ideas for folding this idea into the lesson planning process.

First, preview the text to be read. Academic texts are generally organized into one of these six structures:

- Compare and contrast (similarities and differences)
- Sequence (chronological, steps in a process)
- Cause and effect (or only causes or only effects)
- Sorting and classification (hierarchies, proposition and support, main ideas and details)
- Description
- Whole to part

These structures are standard regardless of the academic content area, but many students aren't aware of them—so they aren't able to use the obvious structure to aid in comprehension. By disclosing these categories and training students to recognize them, teachers can offer students a way to start organizing the information they read as soon as they open a book.

Review the text features. Plan to preview the selection or passage, including titles, subtitles, pictures and captions, graphs and charts, etc. If students miss these features, much of the richness and supporting context is lost. Making students aware of the features will bring them one step closer to reading with good comprehension.

Plan note-taking. Students should read academic texts with a pencil in hand. "Writing while reading increases responsibility and accountability and provides opportunities for teachers to structure students' cognition," says

Dr. Feldman.

When planning instruction, consider the text structure, then determine what kind of graphic note-taking format would expose the embedded organization and

enhance comprehension and retention. If the passage is about a chronological sequence (a series of historical events or steps in a process), consider having students take notes in a format that makes that obvious—for example, in a series of boxes connected by arrows. For cause-and-effect readings, plan to use a visual that graphically represents the target event and conditions

that created it. A Multi-Flow Map would be a good choice (see example, back page). In short, plan to use a note-taking guide that targets key information and makes relationships obvious. In this way, note-taking will capture the essence of the information you want students to acquire from reading.

Select vocabulary to pre-teach. Preview the text and decide which bolded words and key conceptual terms to emphasize. Not all words in bold are equally important. Plan opportunities for students to practice pronouncing and defining key terms in their own words. Use sentence frames or Bridge Maps to show relationships among key terms. Plan to revisit important terms daily throughout the unit.

Plan to build content background. Consider questions that will expose what students already know or think they know about a topic. Graphic organizers like K-W-L (what I *know*, what I *want* to know, what I *learned*) can provide a visual representation of this information. This kind of background building increases the likelihood that students will begin reading their assignment with accurate information, some sense of the topic's importance to their lives, and curiosity aroused.

Take time to formulate good questions. It's hard to develop discussion questions while managing a classroom full of students, so plan ahead to stimulate thinking for each passage. Make sure you know what the big idea is and how each section or paragraph develops that idea. The vocabulary you've selected is the key. Why is this passage important to students' understanding of the content area or unit?

In addition to developing comprehension questions, use Bloom's Taxonomy to frame higher-order questions that move thinking from text-bound to interest-based—that is, relocate the topic or event to another time or novel situation (compare, predict) or evaluate the action in terms of its subsequent effects. It's also a good idea to prepare to focus attention and spark interest by posing "read for" questions. For example, "While reading this passage, notice what Galileo did that was different from his contemporaries."

Plan for rereading. In the same way that effective writing requires multiple drafts to sharpen language and coherence of message, expository text often requires multiple rereads to elicit meaning. It's important to plan multiple reasons to reread significant passages—read silently, then to a partner; read to underline a key phrase; read to summarize—so that students spend time considering and reconsidering important sections of text.

Plan discussion breaks to "chunk" reading.

Attention drifts for most students after a few minutes of silently reading expository text. Plan opportunities for students to discuss what they've just read. Have students stop reading and turn to a partner to explain, in their own words, the meaning of a passage or significance of a described event. This requires only a minute, or 2-3 minutes if you ask for comments from the class. The point is to check for understanding by allowing all students to share their perspective with a partner.

If you plan breaks and focus questions (the "read for" questions mentioned above), they are more likely to occur. This will stimulate student interest and engagement. If your class resists returning to reading after a "talking" break, plan questions that students can write to in learning logs.

Early in the year, consume smaller chunks of the text between breaks, using perhaps only five minutes for extended reading. As students become more skilled, extend passages and plan more global "read for" and discussion questions.

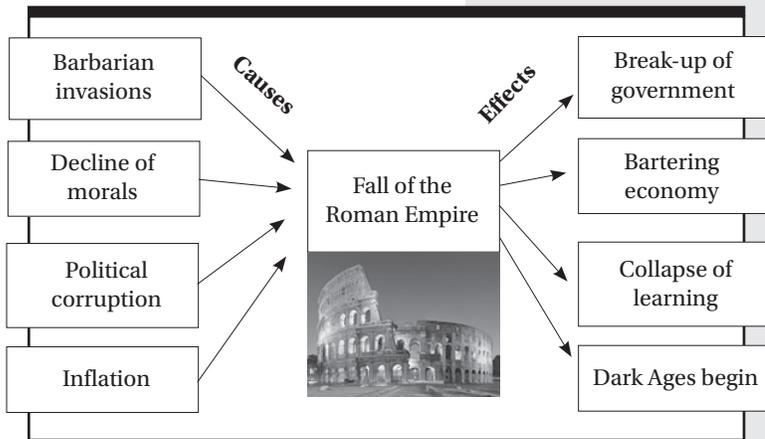
While you won't be able to use all these strategies with every reading assignment, deliberately including a few every day will foster greater comprehension and help students develop solid reading habits they can generalize.

Remember, planning ways to help students engage in academic reading has to occur *before* they enter the classroom. Once they arrive, adjustments may occur, but planning-in-the-moment is too challenging—and generally ineffective.

MODEL & DEVELOP GOOD READING PRACTICES DURING INSTRUCTION

Teachers have opportunities to model effective reading practices every day. Consider the idea of "meta-cognition," which entails thinking about thinking, rolling new ideas over in our minds, and attempting to make sense of them. Good readers do this almost unconsciously. They interact with text, question the author, and consider how the passage supports or contradicts prior knowledge. Poor readers don't know that others are doing this. Regular modeling of meta-cognitive reading opens a window into the world of reading.

"Think alouds" are the most common strategy of this kind. For example, as you begin to read a challenging passage aloud, stop and ask yourself orienting questions (also aloud). "What is the title of this passage? What do I already know about this topic?"



Students can sort causes and effects with a graphic like this, known as a Multi-Flow Map.

MORE STRATEGIES

Directed Reading Thinking

Activity (DRTA) is a guided reading strategy similar to the ones described in this publication. It relies on students making predictions about what's coming next in their reading, then periodically stopping to revisit and confirm or revise predictions, which are shared orally or recorded in learning logs.

SQRRR, an old favorite, teaches students to **S**urvey the text, **Q**uestion themselves about what's coming, **R**ead to find the answer to those questions, **R**ecite in their own words what they learned from the selection and take notes, and **R**evise their notes at the end of the reading.

Reciprocal Teaching is an instructional dialogue between teachers and students designed to help students, working in groups, bring meaning to their reading using the roles of summarizer, question-generator, clarifier, and predictor. Used routinely, students take ownership of the strategies and eventually manage deconstruction of the text independently.

These strategies can be "googled" for more information. ♦

What do I expect to learn from it? What do the pictures show me? I wonder why that one is included. What words have they bolded? What does that one mean? I predict this passage is going to tell me ..."

By doing this, teachers model how students can activate their minds for the reading assignment. As reading aloud proceeds, stop regularly and share comments that you think of as you're reading. If you disagree, say so. If the information doesn't make sense, say so and model rereading to see if clarification can occur. If it still doesn't, model making a note of this. If it

does, express some satisfaction that you were able to figure it out.

Use an overhead projector to model use of the note-taking guide, thinking aloud about how this organizer serves as the skeleton of the passage. Use the structure of the organizer to predict content and how the author will develop it. For example, "This appears to be a compare-and-contrast text structure so I will use a Venn Diagram or Double Bubble Map. That also means I've got to watch for the text to shift from describing one item to describing the next."

What we want all students to experience, but especially struggling readers, is the *thinking* involved in engaged reading and the *strategies* good readers use to extract meaning from text.

SUMMARIZE & EXTEND NEW LEARNING

Quite often, passages read as the bell rings will slip from memory as students pack up their things and move to the next class. Allow time toward the end of the period to stop, recall, and reflect. What are the key points all students should retain? Which are the important end-of-chapter questions they must understand?

Consider asking questions such as, "Which was the most important cause and why?" to force evaluation and justification. Assigning brief writing tasks (like learning logs) that require students to apply new vocabulary and/or explain novel concepts in their own words anchors the learning before students leave the classroom. Confirm whether or not students have grasped the essential ideas of the lesson by reading their learning logs.

Text reading is an essential skill and natural gatekeeper to higher education. Students who read expository text skillfully will become independent learners. Students who don't will waste reading time in class, skip homework assignments, and continue to struggle.

Teachers are the key to student reading success. We can structure the learning environment to scaffold instruction toward reading independence—or not. But if we don't take on this challenge, who will? ♦



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