



Tips and Techniques

Reading Comprehension

Scripture Verse: *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us – ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.* (Ephesians 2:18-19, KJV)

Grade: 1-8

Overview: How often have you heard the comment: "Johnny is a good reader, but he doesn't remember what he reads." Johnny is a member of an important minority of children who read fluently, either with speed or slowly, but frequently give disappointing responses when required to recall the content of the material they just read. It has been said that "comprehension is learning by listening to what one reads." It's much like the child who reads a portion from his reader; when he finishes, the teacher asks him to tell the class what he has read. The child responds "I don't know because I wasn't listening." Listening for comprehension is also known as *content listening*, *informative listening* and *full listening*. The following instructional techniques provide ways for improving comprehension.

Listening to What is Being Read

Reading and attending to what is being read go hand-in-hand. Persons who have learned how to read without attending must be started over, and given practice in listening to what they read. The best approach is to start with short sentence material with one main idea per sentence. The child is taught, first through oral reading, to read one sentence and then provide recall. If he does not remember the content, he can read it again. If this problem does not disappear readily, go back to reading sentences one or two words at a time. Have the child read this sentence over each time, repeating everything he can remember. See the following:

1. The boy
2. The boy ran home
3. The boy ran home, got his fishing rod
4. The boy ran home, got his fishing rod and his dog
5. The boy ran home, got his fishing rod in his dog, and went to the river
6. The boy ran home, got his fishing rod and his dog, and went to the river, where he caught two fish

Provide Advanced Organizers

Provide the reader with a general overview of the content of the material in advance of his actual reading it. Provide an advanced organizer that takes into account the particular content contained in the reading material." Advance organization can be provided by words (spoken or written), diagrams and charts, photographs, or actual models of finished products. Advance organizers are cognitive strategies that help to make complex concepts or tasks clear, and also to relate known information to new or unknown information. They may be designed to facilitate orientation to new information, sequential organization through a task, elaboration of a concept, thematic or dramatic organization of narrative discourse, or other forms of cognitive organization. Advance organizers not only facilitate understanding of new information and completion of complex tasks, they also improve learning and memory at the levels of encoding new information, storing it, and subsequently retrieving it." (See LearNet for more information on Advanced Organizers at http://www.projectlearn.net.org/tutorials/advance_organizers.html)

Reading Sets

Comprehension can be facilitated by providing a reading set, that is, a specific intention to read. If recall of the material is important, tell the student that he will be asked to recall the material. For example, "After you read this story, you will have to tell me five different ways of catching fish." Providing a reading set is very similar to purposeful learning; the teacher (parent) looks over the material to be read and constructs questions to ask, thoughts to ponder, or challenges to be resolved. These items can be presented to the student verbally, written down on a handout, projected from an overhead, or added to a SmartBoard presentation.

Review the Content of the Reading Material

Selecting reading material that is well-written and relevant to the student with whom it is used will help improve comprehension. Provide opportunities for students to choose some of their own reading material. Magazines and popular books are favorites of most middle school students. Opportunities to converse about reading experiences is important. During this time students learn what other students get from their reading and by verbalizing their own reactions to a reading selection become more keenly aware of the mental processes one employs while reading. It is important to provide the thinking time necessary for students to answer questions. It is not uncommon to observe a teacher ask a thought-provoking question, become increasingly uncomfortable as precious minutes are filled with silence, interrupt the thinking going on with more spoken cues to the desired response, and just as the students are beginning to put things together in their minds, answer the question for them.

Predicting the Ending

Have the student read up to a certain point and stop, and then predict the ending. Have him test this prediction by reading silently and then orally particular lines in the story to prove to the group that predictions were right or wrong. This technique, as outlined by Russell G. Stauffer, emphasizes a language-experience approach to reading.

After the first page has been read and all books have been closed, a comprehension check can be started by a number of questions from the teacher. She might ask, as she did before, "What do you think will happen next?" or "Were you right?"

Each question serves a particular purpose. "What do you think now?" and "What do you think will happen next?" set similar focuses more sharply on "what next" ideas. It invites anticipation and speculation about events to come and calls into play the use of ideas garnered thus far.

"Were you right" focuses on proof... The oral rereading to prove a point was done with considerable smoothness and expression.

"What do you think will happen next?" Read pages 102 and 103 and see who is right'.

The Cloze Technique The cloze holds considerable promise as a thinking exercise to prove reading comprehension. The cloze is a deletion method in which underlined blanks are substitutes for certain words that have been taken out of the reading material. The reader simply guesses the word that were taken out and then write them in the proper blank spaces. A of cloze would be:

I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United _____ of America, and to the Republic _____ which it stands. One nation, under _____, indivisible, and with liberty and justice for _____.

The position and frequency of the blanks are adjusted to suit the needs of the reader. Perhaps only one word may be left out in the first reading, with more words omitted for each additional reading.

Dramatization and Illustration

Reading comprehension can be improved by having students illustrate parts of the story with drawings, having them retell the story in their own words, or asking them to dramatize some of the characters in the story.

Put it all Together

Some students have a tendency to focus on a single part of a reading passage and fail to comprehend the main theme. Use Put-It-Together questions which require information from more than one sentence or spot an order to answer the question correctly. The answer to the question may not be found in a single place within the text, but must be inferred from several portions within the text.

Use Games

There are a number of games that parents and teachers can use to improve reading comprehension. One that we have found to be most beneficial is a treasure hunt or scavenger hunt. The student locates the treasure or the items by following instructions written on notes, this is a good technique for checking on understanding of action verbs and nouns. Another popular game is "The Comprehension Zone: Rocket Rap." This game is especially helpful in reading for content and meaning (main idea, details, and sequence of events). The game is self-correcting. It's easy to learn and can be played with two to four players or four teams of two.

Helpful Resources

1. *7 Keys to Comprehension: How to Help Your Kids Read It and Get It!* [Paperback] by Susan Zimmerman and Chryse Hutchins (2003)
2. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement* [Paperback] by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000)