

Helping Students Understand Themselves as Readers

Your students are stagnant in their reading skills. Top students earn top grades assignment after assignment; weak students remain weak.

Goal

To encourage students to improve reading skills by identifying personally effective reading strategies.

How to Reach It

Be sure to feature a host of instructional strategies related to the goal (see the before, during, and after strategies below) and to emphasize metacognition in your program. Metacognitive students are able to describe how they complete tasks and to identify their preferred options for getting things done. Students read better when they can identify specific strategies that will help them comprehend the text that they are reading.

You can help students become aware of themselves as readers by modelling and describing strategies, that is, the know-how or approaches used by effective readers, and by challenging students to identify strategies that work well for them personally. A practical approach is to have students employ a three-part framework to describe their strategies. They should ask themselves these questions:

1. What strategies do I prefer *before* I read this text?
2. What strategies do I prefer *as* I read this text?
3. What strategies do I prefer *after* I read this text?

The link between strategies and specific text reminds students that they may well employ different strategies to read a poem than they would use with an editorial.

Language arts professional literature frequently describes a viable reading process according to what effective readers often do before, during, and after reading. It's a good idea to adopt this terminology to describe reading strategies and to challenge your students to use similar terminology to describe the strategies that work best for them.

BEFORE READING

These strategies recognize that successful readers must fit what is in the text to what they already know about the subject of the text.

- Activating/building background knowledge: Someone familiar with curling, for example, will have the background to make sense of references to "hog lines," "hacks," "skip," "house," and "button"; someone unfamiliar with curling would benefit from building background knowledge to foster reading.
- Setting purpose: The purpose might be to gather information, to locate a specific fact, or to infer character traits. Setting purpose provides a focus for reading.
- Predicting or questioning: This activity also provides a focus for reading.

DURING READING

These strategies vary according to the text being read as well as the reader's preferences.

- Visualizing, or envisioning: This strategy refers to the benefit of picturing or “running the movie” in one’s mind as one reads.
- Chunking text: Here, readers look for units of thought, such as sentences, stanzas, or paragraphs.
- Predicting and questioning: Effective readers often wonder what will follow in a text and express their wondering in a prediction or question. “I think that the butler did it.” (Prediction) “Is someone other than the butler guilty?” (Question)
- Linking text to personal experience: This linking to personal experience is related to activating background knowledge. Personal experience of betrayal should help one understand and judge how well betrayal is presented in a novel.
- Monitoring for meaning: Effective readers respond to something that does not make sense to them by checking back in the text or checking a dictionary or other reference.
- Summarizing or paraphrasing: Putting a text in their own words allows effective readers to work out the essential meaning of the text.

AFTER READING

These strategies overlap with strategies at other stages in the process.

- Summarizing
- Checking predictions
- Answering questions
- Checking to refine interpretations: Successful readers do not settle on meaning too quickly; they interpret meaning and check the text to refine their interpretation. On multiple-choice reading tests, this strategy would take the form of checking the text before settling on one of the options for a question.

Some teachers have added an assessment of reading strategies to traditional assessment of reading comprehension. In addition to requiring students to answer questions about unfamiliar texts, teachers nudge students to note the strategies that they use before, during, and after the reading of the text. Through this approach, you can determine the extent to which students can describe and monitor their learning and processing, and you can emphasize the key point: Students who are able to describe their reading strategies are more skillful readers. The sheet that follows indicates how a Grade 6 student was encouraged to read metacognitively; a photocopiable version appears as an appendix.

Useful Reference

For further information about reading strategies and metacognition, see *I Think, Therefore I Learn!* by Graham Foster, Evelyn Sawicki, Hyacinth Schaeffer, and Victor Zelinski.

Understanding Myself as a Reader

Title of Text _____

Strategies I used before reading:

Strategies I used during reading:

Strategies I used after reading:

My goals for future reading:

What I have learned about myself as a reader: