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Introduction to Reading in Grades 6–12

WHAT IS READING?

Current reading research incorporates the basic tenets of cognitive psychology and schema theory (Gillet & Temple, 1990). In the current model, readers are active participants who use before, during, and after reading strategies to engage with the text. By using the reading process, readers are more than passive participants who merely receive information from the text. As readers interact with the text, they construct meaning by using their prior knowledge (Marr & Gormley, 1982; Pearson, 1985) to make predictions and thus comprehend the text.

The focus on readers as active rather than passive participants in the reading process has resulted in a much more comprehensive understanding of the term *reading*. In addition, our current climate of accountability has also added layers of meaning to the concept of what it means to be a proficient reader. According to No Child Left Behind legislation (2002), the term reading is a complex system of gaining meaning from print that requires students to

- Acquire and maintain the motivation to read
- Understand unfamiliar words
- Read fluently
- Access background information and vocabulary to allow for reading comprehension
- Use appropriate strategies to understand text

WHAT IS THE READING PROCESS?

Middle and high school teachers across the curriculum must teach students how to acquire each of the necessary reading skills through the reading process (Spiro, 1968). There are specific kinds of questions that the proficient reader will ask at each stage of the process. The following is an example of the kinds of thinking that proficient middle and high school students will do as they engage in the reading process:

The Reading Process

Before Reading Activities and Questions

Begin by looking at the title, illustrations, captions, graphs, and charts.
Overview the text structure and length.
Ask yourself: "What do I already know?"
Review prior knowledge and make predictions: "What do I expect to learn?"
Determine purpose: "What will I have to do with this information?"

During Reading Activities and Questions

Determine key points in order to summarize as you read.
Enjoy what you are reading!
Predict what you will learn next.
Ask yourself: "Do I understand what I am reading?"
Revisit your purpose for reading and ask: "What am I learning?"
Target new information and link it to what you already know.

After Reading Activities and Questions

Ask yourself: "What is the main idea of the selection?"
Now use your knowledge and evidence from the text to complete the task.
Consider other interpretations of text.
Help your understanding by using a dictionary if necessary.
Offer to discuss your understanding of the text with another classmate.
Reflect on how you will use the text information in your life.

WHAT DEFINES AN EXPERT READER?

When students consistently use a set of transactional strategies (Pressley, Brown, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1995) in a variety of situations across the curriculum throughout the school year, their reading proficiency will increase. In essence, *transactional* simply means the application of strategies with different kinds of text of varying difficulty levels in all instructional settings. At the outset of transactional learning, students are prompted to use comprehension and work attack strategies. Children learn to use these strategies across a variety of text types in several instructional settings, including reading groups that focus

on high-quality literature. As a student reads, the teacher prompts him or her to use comprehension and word attack strategies. As time goes on, however, students are expected to internalize the strategies and apply them independently in all content-area and literature-based classrooms.

The strategies that expert readers must acquire include

- Setting a purpose for reading
- Connecting to prior knowledge
- Determining the meaning of words not understood or recognized
- Identifying significant information in the text
- Visualizing text information
- Asking questions to develop a deeper understanding
- Drawing conclusions and making inferences
- Analyzing text structure
- Evaluating the author's viewpoint

The idea that students must acquire strategies that they are able to use independently is one that is also shared by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). To participate in our democracy as informed citizens, IRA and NCTE have stipulated through their standards (1996) that students must be able to read a wide range of texts; apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts; and become highly reflective and critical members of a literate society.

WHO ARE TEACHERS OF READING?

Teachers of reading are all teachers who interact with students to assist them in acquiring and integrating new knowledge. The kinds of teachers who are teachers of reading include but are not limited to literature, science, history, civics, economics, math, home economics, technology education, computer science, art, music, and physical education teachers. All subject areas require students to internalize a certain skill level and knowledge base. Therefore, teachers of all subject areas are teachers of reading.

WHAT IS THE ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY WITH WHICH TO TALK ABOUT TEXT?

As students engage actively with text by using the reading process, it is essential that they develop a common language with which to talk about text. In a highly literate secondary classroom, teachers must formulate comprehension questions, discussions, creative activities, and various forms of assessment that utilize the vocabulary that expert readers use. As students discuss text and interact with text in various ways, they will gain a greater facility with the following terminology:

Analyze	Draw a conclusion or make a judgment based on the text information
Audience	The target group for a message
Author	The creator of text
Cite	Quote or refer to an author's work to support or prove an idea
Describe	Use words to create a mental picture of a person, place, object, or idea
Elaborate	Clarify using multiple details and examples
Evaluate	Judge based on evidence, and use support to give the good and bad points
Explain	Identify reasons or causes
Inference	A conclusion drawn from logical reasoning
Interpret	Explain the meaning of text in your own words
Justify	Use examples to support a concept or belief
Paraphrase	Put in your own words
Passage	A portion of text (paragraph(s) or verse(s))
Position	An author's attitude, opinion, or viewpoint in an argument
Predict	Make an educated guess about what will happen next
Quotation	Exact words from the text punctuated with quotation marks
Relevant	Connected in an obvious way to the topic
Response	A detailed reaction to text (personal, analytical, etc.)
Significant	Important information
Summarize	Condense the main points using as few words as possible
Support	Provide details or examples to back up your opinion
Text features	Ways authors enhance text (graphics, photos, sidebars, and headings)
Text structure	Writing patterns authors use to convey meaning
Text	All author-created materials, in both print and nonprint media

There are many components to building a solid foundation for reading. Students must acquire reading strategies that they use with automaticity as they engage in the reading process. To facilitate the acquisition of reading strategies, middle and high school teachers must create a learning environment in which students are exposed to a wide variety of texts and therefore motivated to become highly literate members of our democratic society. When such learning environments are created, students learn and achieve at the highest levels of performance.