



## Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction



*Direct and explicit instruction focused on comprehension strategies results in improved reading comprehension for students. Comprehension strategies are specific actions or tools readers use to increase their understanding of texts. Classroom comprehension activities might include students using graphic organizers, summarizing, paraphrasing, or identifying main ideas. Direct and explicit instruction involves teachers modeling strategies, explaining why strategies help comprehension, and telling students when to use specific strategies. Teachers then provide students with support and feedback as they begin to apply strategies.*

### How to carry out the recommendation

1. Select carefully the text to use when first beginning to teach a given strategy.
2. Show students how to apply the strategies they are learning to different texts, not just to one text.
3. Ensure that the text is appropriate for the reading level of students.
4. Use direct and explicit instruction for teaching students how to use comprehension strategies.
5. Provide the appropriate amount of guided practice depending on the difficulty level of the strategies that the students are learning.
6. When teaching comprehension strategies, make sure students understand that the goal is to understand the content of the text.

### Potential roadblocks

1. Many teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies.
2. Teachers from some content areas do not feel responsible for teaching reading comprehension strategies.
3. Teachers and students become too focused on specific comprehension strategies versus improved overall comprehension.

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*Reference:* Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices* (NCEE 2008-4027). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/8>



*How to carry out the recommendation*

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**1. Select carefully the text to use when first beginning to teach a given strategy.**

Purposefully align selected text styles with appropriate comprehension strategies. For example, summarizing main ideas aligns well with nonfiction textbooks while reflection questions might be more useful for narrative text comprehension.

**2. Show students how to apply the strategies they are learning to different texts, not just to one text.**

Have students utilize learned strategies with varying text styles. This experience will provide them with the opportunity to think critically about which comprehension strategies work best in different situations.

**3. Ensure that the text is appropriate for the reading level of students.**

It is key to find a text that is slightly challenging and also not too easy for the students. If a text is too simple, students will not need the support of comprehension strategies. If students are struggling with the text itself, they will have difficulty effectively applying the comprehension strategy. Begin by choosing a single-level text for modeling and then have students practice applying the strategy with text at their reading level.

**4. Use direct and explicit instruction for teaching students how to use comprehension strategies.**

Research has shown that knowledge of reading comprehension strategies alone does not result in students applying strategies independently. In addition to knowledge of strategies, students must also understand why strategies are important and when to use them. Direct and explicit instruction is very detailed about what strategy to use, why to use it, and how to use it. Feedback is provided to students as they begin to apply strategies independently.

**5. Provide the appropriate amount of guided practice depending on the difficulty level of the strategies that the students are learning.**

Different comprehension strategies require varying amounts of time to learn. Some strategies can be learned from one demonstration while others are more complex. For more complex strategies, start student practice in small groups with high levels of teacher support, then release the students into pairs and provide less support. Finally, have students practice independently.

**6. When teaching comprehension strategies, make sure students understand that the goal is to understand the content of the text.**

Reading comprehension strategies are a tool for supporting a better overall understanding of a text. Sometimes a focus on teaching specific strategies can distract students from overall text comprehension. Frequently remind yourself and students that improved reading comprehension is the goal, not just using strategies.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

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Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Many teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies.</i>	<p>Teachers may find it difficult to confidently model how they use strategies to comprehend text because it is something they do automatically. Additionally, many educator preparation programs do not cover teaching reading comprehension strategies.</p> <p>Professional development that includes opportunities for teachers to practice and receive feedback will help them develop the knowledge and skills required to provide explicit instruction of reading comprehension skills.</p>
<i>Teachers from some content areas do not feel responsible for teaching reading comprehension strategies.</i>	<p>The goal of teaching reading comprehension strategies is to increase a student's ability to understand texts in all contents. Therefore, the time taken to teach comprehension strategies will be regained as students become more effective content learners, resulting in better student performance in all content areas.</p>
<i>Teachers and students become too focused on specific comprehension strategies versus improved overall comprehension.</i>	<p>Stay clear and focused on the goal of increased comprehension. When teaching strategies, be purposeful in application. Additionally, the effectiveness of different strategies will depend not only on context but also on student preferences as well. Frequently remind yourself and your students that improved reading comprehension is the goal and there is no one right way to get there.</p>



*For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited on the bottom of the first page of this document.*