



Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension



Teachers must create an environment where students actively engage with a text to extract and construct its meaning. This involves choosing reading materials that offer students a choice in what to read as well as opportunities to collaborate with one another. Creating this context by clearly conveying the purpose of each lesson, explaining to students how the comprehension strategies will help them learn, and impressing on them that the power to be successful readers rests as much with them as it does with their teacher will guide students to become better readers. Additionally, teachers must help students focus not only on completing classroom tasks but also, and more importantly, on the larger goal of learning.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Help students discover the purpose and benefits of reading.
2. Create opportunities for students to see themselves as successful readers.
3. Give students reading choices.
4. Give students the opportunity to learn by collaborating with their peers.

Potential roadblocks

1. When I put students in learning groups, they get off task.
2. Some students still will not engage in classroom reading comprehension activities.
3. Teachers do not have the resources to offer the range of choices that may appeal to students, or they may believe that content standards do not allow them to offer such choices.
4. Students often choose texts that are too easy or too difficult for them.

Reference: Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2010-4038). 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/14>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Help students discover the purpose and benefits of reading.

During the school day, teachers should model the importance of being able to read in our everyday lives and how it helps us learn about the world around us. For example, as you walk around the school, point out various notices posted and talk about the information presented. In the classroom, teachers should make reading enjoyable by giving it a prominent role and providing as many books as possible aligned with their students' interests and relevant to their lives.

To adapt for younger children who may not have the ability to read what is posted around the classroom, pair text with pictures that provide context and explanation. Additionally, as students are learning to understand the importance of reading and moving toward reading on their own, creating a welcoming and special place for reading in the classroom can help set the stage and build a sense of excitement about reading.

2. Create opportunities for students to see themselves as successful readers.

Teachers should help students build a growth mindset and increase their intrinsic motivation regarding reading. When selecting reading comprehension assignments, be aware of the difficulty level so as to provide activities that are challenging but attainable with effort. Set the bar high but clearly express the expectations that students can and do meet the comprehension challenges, providing appropriate supports along the way. Work with students to set goals, monitor progress toward those goals, and provide frequent positive feedback to increase students' intrinsic motivation to read.

When students struggle to comprehend a text, teachers can steer them in the right direction by asking questions such as “why” and “how.” The idea is to get them to focus on what they are reading or to use their strategies and skills to understand the text. Instead of punishing students for mistakes or failures, it is better to help them recognize and learn from such errors; remember, the point is learning. Let students know that mistakes or difficult tasks are opportunities to learn, and encourage them to try despite the challenges.

3. Give students reading choices.

Suggested evidence-based practices for providing students choice include the following:

- After establishing an instructional purpose, provide a selection of texts that align with this purpose from which students can choose.
- Provide a variety of reading activities or centers from which students can choose.
- Allow students to choose the order in which they complete their work.
- Help students find texts they would be interested in by thinking of questions to guide their decision making.
- Allow students to choose how they want to respond to a text.
- Give students a choice of location in the classroom to read.

Examples to accompany each of these practices can be found on pages 36 and 37 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

4. Give students the opportunity to learn by collaborating with their peers.

Collaborative learning activities are most productive when (1) students perceive their roles as valuable and (2) teachers motivate students to help their peers learn rather than simply giving their peers the answer. Examples of collaborative learning opportunities include the following:

- Have students read the same text and then talk to a partner about what they read, what they predicted, and any connections they made while reading.
- Ask students to work in pairs to retell a story, identify the main characters or story setting, or make predictions about how the story will end.
- To guide students to learn interesting facts using informational text, group students and have them take turns sharing their favorite fact from the same text.
- Using texts that provide guidance about a simple task, have groups of students take turns following the instructions step-by-step to complete the task as a group.
- Organize students in small groups and have them perform a scripted version of a story they have read, create their own dramatization of a story, or write a new story.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>When I put students in learning groups, they get off task.</i>	Teachers should ensure students understand the activity’s purpose. Additionally, teachers should provide clear and explicit expectations for the group while being careful not to give up too much control all at once.
<i>Some students still will not engage in classroom reading comprehension activities.</i>	Developing special projects involving reading can provide additional motivation for students. Furthermore, teachers should provide positive feedback and be mindful that aversion to reading may signal frustration, boredom, or possibly a learning disability. For particularly disengaged students, having colleagues and other school personnel observe in the classroom and then brainstorm together about how to reach them can be beneficial.
<i>Teachers do not have the resources to offer the range of choices that may appeal to students, or they may believe that content standards do not allow them to offer such choices.</i>	When developing choice for students, focus on offering choices that are appealing but not elaborate or costly. Many resources and ideas developed by other teachers are readily and freely available via the Internet. If the concern is about a particular learning objective or content standard, a teacher can follow up on a lesson by allowing students to choose a text to read on their own or choose another activity, such as reading to a peer.
<i>Students often choose texts that are too easy or too difficult for them.</i>	Group students by reading level, offer them a selection of books that match that level, and explicitly teach students how to select appropriate titles. For example, the “five-finger method” has students choose a text and begin to read it, holding all five fingers up. For each word that gives them trouble, they fold down a finger. If all five fingers are folded down while reading the same page, they should choose an easier book.



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 at the bottom of the first page of this document.