



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUR READING COMPREHENSION

Good readers employ many strategies regularly, without thinking about them; however, poor readers have few strategies from which to draw. As you read in class with your students, share with them some of the following suggestions.

1. **Analyze the time and place in which you are reading** - If you've been reading or studying for several hours, mental fatigue may be the source of the problem. If you are reading in a place with distractions or interruptions, you may not be able to understand what you're reading.
2. **Rephrase each paragraph in your own words** - You might need to approach complicated material sentence by sentence, expressing each in your own words.
3. **Read aloud sentences or sections that are particularly difficult** - Reading out loud sometimes makes complicated material easier to understand.
4. **Reread difficult or complicated sections** - At times, in fact, several readings are appropriate and necessary.
5. **Slow down your reading rate** - On occasion, simply reading more slowly and carefully will provide you with the needed boost in comprehension.
6. **Turn headings into questions** - Refer to these questions frequently and jot down or underline answers.
7. **Write a brief outline of major points** - This will help you see the overall organization and progression of ideas.
8. **Highlight key ideas** - After you've read a section, go back and think about and highlight what is important. Highlighting forces you to sort out what is important, and this sorting process builds comprehension and recall.
9. **Write notes in the margins** - Explain or rephrase difficult or complicated ideas or sections.
10. **Determine whether you lack background knowledge** - Comprehension is difficult, at times, and it is impossible, if you lack essential information that the writer assumes you have.

Non-verbal signals

The meaning of a text is not only conveyed by means of words. All texts also contain non-verbal signs. This can be the use of certain style features, such as different fonts, bold print, underlining, or italics. The meaning of these style features can be different in different text. In one text italics may be used to emphasize a word, in another text italics can indicate can be used to make subtitles.

Layout features are also non-verbal signals. For example:

- **Heading:** a title printed at the top of a page to indicate the subject matter that is going to be discussed in a particular chapter, column or section.
- **Title:** tells you what the text is about.
- **Subheading:** presents you with a brief summary, an introduction or explanation.
- **Photographs:** pictures related to an article or a text.
- **Captions:** comments on pictures related to a text.
- **Division into paragraphs:** each paragraph is a unity and deals with one particular idea.
- **Figures, graphs, bar charts, etc:** to visualize facts and figures presented in the text.

The Structure of Paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of sentences. The number of sentences and words in a paragraph depends on the subject, but on average, paragraphs contain between 75 and 150 words. Each paragraph deals with one aspect of the subject of the text. So, it is usually possible to give each paragraph its own subtitle, which summarizes the contents of the paragraph in one sentence.

A typical paragraph consists of three parts. The first sentence contains the topic sentence, which is the heart of the paragraph. The topic sentence (also called thesis sentence or key sentence) contains the new aspect of the subject of the text. The second part of the paragraph contains sentences which develop the aspect. These sentences may contain arguments, explanations, details, examples, and other supporting evidence. The last sentence of a paragraph is often a summary of the paragraph or a linking sentence to the next paragraph.

In many well written texts the reader will get a good impression of the contents by reading just the first sentences (= the topic sentences) of each paragraph.

Transitions Used to Join Ideas

Paragraphs are linked in a logical way by link words. These link words are also used within a paragraph. These signal words are often called transition words. They provide the reader with a specific indication of what the author has in mind, the direction he / she is heading. They alert the reader of what is coming, just as a traffic signal provides the driver of a car with information of what is ahead: a stop sign, a curve, a speech limit, a hill, an intersection, a falling rock zone. Similarly, transitions indicate cause and effect, a listing of random items, a chronology, a comparison or contrast. Knowing these words can provide students with a tool for making sense of the form of the piece they are reading. Knowing these words allow the students to see into the mind of the writer, able to follow the argument or recital of information that the author is presenting.

It is important to keep these words in the consciousness of our students. Because these words are often short and familiar, it is tempting to ignore them, favoring, instead, the longer, more difficult words when teaching vocabulary. That is a mistake.

The phrase “equally important” differs in use from “whereas.” “Conversely” serves a different function than does “nevertheless.” “Unquestionably” differs from “consequently.” Without instruction, our students might miss out on the important information that each of these transitions conveys.

Here is a list of some common transitional devices that can be used to cue your reader in a given way.

To Add:

and, again, and then, besides, equally important, finally, further, furthermore, nor, too, next, lastly, what's more, moreover, in addition, first (second, etc.),

To Compare:

whereas, but, yet, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, by comparison, where, compared to, up against, balanced against, vis a vis, but, although, conversely, meanwhile, after all, in contrast, although this may be true

To Prove:

because, for, since, for the same reason, obviously, evidently, furthermore, moreover, besides, indeed, in fact, in addition, in any case, that is

To Show Exception:

yet, still, however, nevertheless, in spite of, despite, of course, once in a while, sometimes

To Show Time:

immediately, thereafter, soon, after a few hours, finally, then, later, previously, formerly, first (second, etc.), next, and then

To Repeat:

in brief, as I have said, as I have noted, as has been noted,

To Emphasize:

definitely, extremely, obviously, in fact, indeed, in any case, absolutely, positively, naturally, surprisingly, always, forever, perennially, eternally, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without a doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation

To Show Sequence:

first, second, third, and so forth. A, B, C, and so forth. next, then, following this, at this time, now, at this point, after, afterward, subsequently, finally, consequently, previously, before this, simultaneously, concurrently, thus, therefore, hence, next, and then, soon

To Give an Example:

for example, for instance, in this case, in another case, on this occasion, in this situation, take the case of, to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration, to illustrate

To Summarize or Conclude:

in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently, on the whole,

Sharing these words, and their uses in writing, with our students gives them yet another tool to discover meaning as they read the texts that we present them with. Similarly, an awareness of these words should carry over into their writing as we ask them to include transitions in their daily writing. Structuring a writing assignment—an essay, a quiz, a reflection, bell work—to include such words will improve the fluency of a student's writing—something reflected in the CAPT scoring. A disjointed presentation of ideas, no matter how accurate, makes a less favorable impression than does writing that flows smoothly and logically.