

COMPREHENSION

WHAT IS COMPREHENSION?

Comprehension is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to (1) decode what they read; (2) make connections between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think deeply about what they have read. One big part of comprehension is having a sufficient vocabulary, or knowing the meanings of enough words.

WHY IS COMPREHENSION IMPORTANT?

Readers who have strong comprehension are able to draw conclusions about what they read – what is important, what is a fact, what caused an event to happen, which characters are funny. Comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning. A child who does not comprehend text will have difficulty learning by reading.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP COMPREHENSION SKILLS

Read, read, read! Read to your children every day. Make it part of your bedtime routine, an after-dinner activity, or a fun way to spend time together on the couch.

Set a good example by letting your children see you read Show them that reading is a good choice for leisure activity and is better than watching TV. Talk about the book you're reading. Listening to you summarize your book teaches your children how to take what they've read, absorb it, and condense it.

Use pre-reading comprehension techniques Before reading a book, have your child look at the cover and the inside pictures and predict what the story is about.

Read books together and discuss Read to your children every evening. At the end of each chapter, discuss what happened. Parents can still share books with older children by reading the same book separately. Ask your child every day, "Where are you in the book? Did you get to Chapter 5 yet? What do you think about what happened to Harry?" Allowing children to retell a story that they read lets them practice comprehension skills.

Play board games with your children Board games require putting into action everything that is read, and can help increase reading comprehension. Help your children read the instructions to a new board game or review the rules

of an old favorite. Ask if they'd like to change the rules or game play slightly and implement their suggestions.

Cook or bake with a recipe Find a lengthy recipe for something that your children love to eat and make it together. Turn over recipe reading duties to your children and watch them take what they've read and turn it into something delicious.

Use the book club discussion questions in the back of books Many chapter books include discussion questions for book clubs, which provide good discussion points for at-home book talks.

Play with inflection Try this with your young child: Read a line from a book and have your child repeat it back to you with dramatic expression, inflection and phrasing.

As You Read... You may be reading to your child or practicing paired reading. Stop at natural points in the reading and check the child's comprehension. Ask questions such as "Where are they? What just happened? How would you feel if someone did that? Do you know anyone like that? What do you think will happen next?" You can change the questions depending on the type of material you are reading. But, the point of the questions should be to:

- monitor your child's comprehension of the text;
- relate the meaning of the text to their own knowledge and experience;
- predict and prepare to comprehend the next section of the text.

If while monitoring your child can't answer a question correctly, then go back and read again to find the answer. To prevent frustration, only reread a section once and then give him a clue from the text to answer correctly. Don't get too bogged down; if you are, the text may be too difficult for your child.

Teach your child to perform the following skills while reading:

CREATING MENTAL IMAGES (VISUALIZING) This strategy involves the ability of readers to make "pictures in their brains" of a text as a way to understand processes or events they encounter during reading. This ability can be an indication that a reader understands the text. Some research suggests that readers who visualize as they read are better able to recall what they have read than those who do not visualize.

QUESTIONING This strategy involves readers asking themselves questions throughout the reading of text. The ability of readers to ask themselves relevant questions as they read is especially valuable in helping them to integrate information, identify main ideas, and summarize information. Asking the right

questions allows good readers to focus on the most important information in a text.

INFERRING Authors do not always provide complete descriptions of, or explicit information about a topic, setting, character, or event. However, they often provide clues that readers can use to “read between the lines”—by making inferences that combine information in the text with their schema.

EVALUATING (DETERMINING IMPORTANCE) Determining importance has to do with knowing why you’re reading and then making decisions about what information or ideas are most critical to understanding the overall meaning of the piece.

SYNTHESIZING Synthesizing is the process of ordering, recalling, retelling, and recreating into a coherent whole the information with which our minds are bombarded everyday. Synthesizing is closely linked to evaluating. Basically, as we identify what’s important, we interweave our thoughts to form a comprehensive perspective to make the whole greater than just the sum of the parts.