

Beyond Comprehension Builder: Strengthening Reading Comprehension Every Day

As the previous pages have explained, the lessons in this book provide explicit instruction for comprehension strategies and specific comprehension question types. Additionally, it is important to incorporate reading comprehension instruction and practice throughout the year and across subject areas because reading is a big part of how students access learning and information, both in school and beyond. You can work on comprehension as part of almost any lesson and discussion throughout the school day. With that in mind, the following pages provide simple ways to strengthen students' comprehension in various contexts.

Emphasize Knowledge-Building Activities

As students expand what they know about the world, they are better able to connect new information to prior learning, draw inferences, and deepen understanding. When teachers emphasize knowledge building—both in reading and in other content areas—students gain the background knowledge and context that support strong reading comprehension.

- Incorporate real-life objects (realia) or visual aids like charts, models, and videos to build background knowledge before reading a text or to support connection-building and retention after reading a text.
- Incorporate texts from a wide variety of topics (e.g., history, sports, animals, plants, geography, technology, art, culture, food, weather, etc.).
- Create a checklist or scavenger hunt to encourage students to read about a variety of topics during independent reading time throughout the year.
- After reading a text, prompt students to generate questions they still have about the topic and guide them in doing research to find the answer.
- Create a class knowledge wall to add fun facts to throughout the year.
- Use analogies to link new concepts to ones students are likely to already be familiar with.
- Match fictional texts with relevant nonfiction texts or informational videos.
- Incorporate a brief "Show and Tell" into your weekly or monthly routine. Participate along with the students. Make an effort to share something that many students may not know much about and use rich vocabulary to present it.
- Support students in forming book clubs centered on common themes, encouraging collaboration and deeper learning.

Emphasize the Purpose of Reading

When students understand why they are reading, they approach the text with greater focus. This sense of purpose supports their comprehension and builds the habits of engaged, effective readers.

- Remind students that the purpose of reading is to comprehend.
- Provide students with a variety of reading material and frequent opportunities to choose what they read.
- Offer texts from a variety of topics, reading levels, and formats (e.g., articles, graphics, infographics, comics, transcripts, etc.).
- Model a reading life. Share what you're currently reading, and do frequent read-alouds.
- Guide students to create from what they read (e.g., how-to presentations, mini-podcasts, infographics, demos, or teaching younger students).
- Invite student leadership. Assign hosts for story discussions and invite students to add to a class book-recommendation wall.
- Explain how most subjects (e.g., math, science, social studies, etc.) require the ability to read in order to do well.

Incorporate Meaning Into Foundational Skills Practice

Comprehension development can and should occur alongside foundational skills. While students may need to spend more time on phonics, fluency, and oral language early on, they don't need to reach mastery before working on reading comprehension. In fact, incorporating multiple components simultaneously helps each skill reinforce the other. Students should understand from the beginning that words carry meaning.

- When manipulating letters to practice phonics skills (e.g., wig → big → bid → bad → fad → fed), discuss the meanings of the words—especially any that are uncommon or less likely to be understood by students (e.g., bid, fad).
- When decoding words in passages, pause to discuss words that have homonyms. Point out their similarities (sounds or spellings) and differences (meanings and sounds or spellings).
- When working on fluency with read-alongs or repeated readings, emphasize the importance of expression.
 - Explain that using expression helps the reader communicate and bring out the meaning of the words.
 - Remind students to pause for commas and periods, emphasize important words, adjust their pitch for questions, etc.
 - For students working in Read Naturally programs:
 - After conducting a Cold Timing, remind the student of a specific component of expression for them to focus on during the Read Along and Practice steps.
 - Before conducting a Hot Timing, draw the student's attention to the expression rubric and discuss your expectations.
- After a student reads for you, ask them what they think a particular phrase or sentence means.
- Incorporate read-alouds frequently, and pause periodically for group discussions.
- Allow students to discuss short-answer questions with a partner before writing their responses.
- For students working in Read Naturally programs, scaffold writing steps by allowing students to respond orally until they're ready to type independently.

Develop Writing Skills

Writing gives students a way to process, organize, and express their understanding of text. As they put ideas into their own words—through summaries, responses, and written explanations—students clarify their thinking and strengthen their comprehension.

- Have students practice writing while reading. Require a brief margin note (or sketch) per section of text.
- Use simple checklists for students to self-monitor their written responses (e.g., answered the question, included evidence, used key terms).
- Have students journal or write their reactions to texts they've read, videos they've watched, or discussions they've had in class.
- Incorporate peer-reviewing practice. Guide students to note strengths, ask questions, and give suggestions.
- Use writing activities as exit slips (e.g., gist statements, sample sentences, claim-evidence-reasoning frames).

Expand Word Knowledge and Vocabulary

Knowing more words makes it possible for students to understand more of what they read. Prioritizing vocabulary development—through explicit instruction and exposure in context—ensures students can access more complex texts and engage with a wider range of content.

- Use rich vocabulary with students, explaining the meanings of new words.
- Guide students in maintaining difficult word lists or journals where they record the word, the definition (in their own words) and other connection points that may help them like a sample sentence, a drawing, a synonym/antonym, a common context, or a "source tag" (reminder of where they learned the word).
- Discuss whether words are specific to certain subjects or if they "travel well" through many different contexts.
- Have multilingual students scan the text to see if any words look like or remind them of words from their home/additional language (e.g., run a quick "cognate hunt"). Teach them to confirm whether the words they find are cognates by using context and/or a dictionary. Maintain a "tricky twins" or "false friends" list to keep track of false cognates throughout the year.
- Teach morphology explicitly (common prefixes/suffixes/roots).
- Practice identifying synonyms and antonyms or building semantic gradients.
- Incorporate word games into your daily routine (e.g., crossword puzzles, word searches, etc.).
- Pause to discuss new/difficult words during class read-alouds.
- Develop a class dictionary throughout the year that includes student definitions, drawings, and sample sentences, or design a collaborative word wall. Have students present their contributions to their peers.
- Ask students to tell you about key words in reading passages and how they're used.
 - For students working in Read Naturally programs:
 - Ask them how the key words relate to one another and what inferences they can make about the story based on the key words.
 - Ask them if there are any other words they think could have been identified as key words and explain why.
 - Remind them to use the key words in their predictions and retells.

Develop Academic Language

Academic language gives students the vocabulary and structures they need to understand and communicate complex ideas across subjects. By intentionally using/modeling, teaching, and reinforcing these words and phrases, teachers help students engage with grade-level texts, participate in discussions, and express their understanding with clarity and precision.

- Find an academic word list to reference and make an effort to incorporate those words throughout your instruction.
- Include academic language in lesson objectives.
- Scaffold instruction with sentence frames such as:
 - **According** to "____," ____ . This **fact demonstrates** ____ .
 - The **rate/percentage/pattern** of ____ **indicates** ____ .
 - **Therefore**, it is **reasonable** to **claim** that ____ .
- Encourage precision upgrades: replace vague words (e.g., thing, stuff, good) with domain terms; keep a "better word" list.
- Expose students to rubric language (precision of terms, accurate evidence, effective connectors), and use academic language when giving oral feedback.

Teach and Reinforce Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension strategies help students actively engage with text, therefore deepening their understanding of it. Teaching specific strategies equips students to process text more effectively, monitor their own thinking, and analyze complex ideas. **The Before, During, and After-Reading Strategies lessons in Section 1 of Comprehension Builder provide explicit instruction and practice to help students learn comprehension strategies.** After completing the lessons, it's important to continue reinforcing students' use of the strategies throughout the year.

- Display the Before, During, and After Reading Strategies poster and reference it while working in other subject areas as you implement the strategies.
- "Catch" your students using the strategies, ask them to identify the strategy they used, and praise them for using it.
- During your read-aloud time, model expression and the use of the different strategies.
- Review and practice the before, during, and after reading strategies:

Strategies		Suggestions
Before	Activating Prior Knowledge	▪ Prior to reading a passage for the first time, ask students if they have ever read about or have any personal experience with the topic. ▪ Complete a quick K–G–W (what we Know, our Gaps, what we Want to learn) on a sticky note and revisit after reading.
	Learning Key Words	▪ Connect the key words to morphology and/or cognates (e.g., geo = earth; evaporation/ evaporación).
	Making a Prediction	▪ Scaffold instruction by first allowing oral predictions, then writing together, and then providing sentence starters or frames (e.g., I think this story will be about...because...). ▪ When checking predictions that students write, ask students how they decided on what they wrote.
During	Questioning	▪ While working on fluency with repeated readings, have students draw out and answer one Teacher Question Card (found in the Section 1 folder of the USB drive) between readings.
	Visualizing	▪ Remind students before reading to consider what they wonder about, what they visualize, etc., while they are reading. After reading, ask them to share with you or with a partner.
	Making Inferences	▪ Discuss connections within the text that could lead to a justified inference. ▪ Teach the equations: ◦ Text Clues + What I Know = Inference ◦ Text Clues + Text Clues = Inference
	Monitoring, Clarifying, and Fix-up	▪ Have students write a prediction before practicing fluency with repeated readings. Then, briefly touch base between practice readings and ask students to remind you what their prediction was. Follow up by asking if their prediction was correct and encourage them to elaborate on their answer. ▪ Teach and model markings to use in the margin, for example: ? (confusing) ★ (new idea) ! (important) ↔ (connection)
After	Answering Questions	▪ See the question types section on page 13.
	Retelling and Summarizing	▪ Scaffold instruction by first allowing oral retells, then writing together, and then providing sentence starters or frames (e.g., "This text is mostly about..."). ▪ Have students turn and talk to their neighbor for one minute (each student taking 30 seconds) to tell the other about what they're reading. Model your expectations of what makes for a quality sharing. When the minute is up, ask students to share what they learned about their partner's reading material.

Teach and Reinforce Text Structures

Understanding common text structures helps readers recognize patterns and see relationships between ideas. Explicit instruction in text structures gives students a framework for organizing information, making it easier to comprehend, and retain, what they read.

- Many schools use a variety of graphic organizers in their core reading instruction. Collaborate with core teachers to identify organizers that the students are accustomed to using and have them available in your setting.
- Model text structure identification during read-alouds. Name the structure and point to the signal words/features.
- Teach, review, and discuss a variety of text structures/elements:

Structures/Elements		Suggestions
Fiction	Characters	▪ Make a list of characters and choose a few to create character profiles for. Include a sketch, 2–3 traits, and a relevant text quote for each.
	Point of View/ Narrator	▪ Identify the narrator (1st/2nd/3rd, limited/omniscient/objective) and underline a line in the text that proves it.
	Setting	▪ Circle or underline words and phrases that define the setting. ▪ Draw or describe the scene and/or fill out a "setting snapshot" with boxes for time, place, environment, and context.
	Goal/Motivation	▪ Complete: "___ needs/wants ___ because ___ ." for important characters/groups.
	Problem/Conflict	▪ Name the conflict type (person/self/nature/society) and find supporting text evidence.
	Plot/Action	▪ Make a 4–6 panel "so/but/then" storyboard of key events; caption each with a page/line reference.
	Turning Point/ Climax	▪ Have students identify the climax and do performative readings of that section of text.
	Resolution	▪ Have students explain the resolution in their own words. List potential costs and benefits of the resolution. Ask students to come up with alternative resolutions.
	Symbols/Themes	▪ Discuss the theme(s) as a group. Have students find a symbol in the text (or come up with their own) that aligns with the theme. Create a mini-presentation with the theme, symbol, and relevant text evidence/quotes.
Nonfiction	Description/ Definition	▪ Fill out a graphic organizer with spaces for the definition, a picture, an example, a non-example, etc.
	Sequence/Process	▪ Identify signal words (e.g., first, next, then, earlier, etc.) while reading. ▪ Have students complete a retell where they recount the events in chronological order. Then, have them identify the differences from the original text.
	Compare-Contrast	▪ Fill out a T-chart or Venn diagram. ▪ Identify signal words (e.g., both, alike, but, unlike) while reading and/or use common signal words to write a summary/retell.
	Cause-Effect	▪ Have students match pictures representing causes and effects. ▪ Create a cause → effect chain, and brainstorm additional possible effects.
	Problem-Solution	▪ Identify the problem and brainstorm possible solutions while reading. After finishing the text, identify which solution was implemented and discuss its costs and benefits.
	Categorization	▪ Encourage two valid ways to group the same items (e.g., by function vs. by parts; by habitat vs. by diet) to build flexible thinking.
	Question-Answer	▪ Name the central question early. Turn the title/heading into a question. After reading, answer that question with references from the text.
	Claim-Evidence	▪ Find three evidence snippets from the text; students use them to write a claim.
	Cycle	▪ Draw a diagram with the stages; note consequences if a stage is disrupted.

Teach and Reinforce a Variety of Question Types

Comprehension grows when students engage with questions that address different levels of understanding. Teaching them how to respond to a variety of question types equips readers to think critically and demonstrate their learning in academic settings. **The Question-Specific Comprehension Lessons in Section 2 of Comprehension Builder provide explicit instruction and practice to help students learn about and explore how to respond to a variety of question types.** After completing the lessons, it's important to continue reinforcing students' understanding of and ability to respond to specific question types throughout the year.

- For students using Read Naturally programs or other programs that report on question types, review students' comprehension graphs with them and set goals together based on gaps.
- Have students practice generating their own questions.
- Incorporate specific question types in other subject areas for additional practice.
- Monitor whether students are struggling with a particular question type and provide targeted support:

Question Type	Tell the student...
Detail (Literal)	▪ A detail question asks for a piece of information or a fact stated in the text of the story. ▪ Skim the text to find words from the question, and then look for the answer in the text: It's right there!
Detail (Literal) (Sequencing)	▪ A sequencing question requires you to put events from the story into chronological order. ▪ Chronological order means the order the events happened, which is not always the order they are talked about in the story. ▪ After you arrange the answer choices in chronological order, reread the events to make sure they happened in that order.
Detail (Literal) (Cloze)	▪ A cloze question requires you to select words from a list to complete a paragraph about the story. ▪ After you select the answers, reread each sentence to check that the paragraph makes sense.
Short Answer	▪ Short-answer questions require you to write one or more sentences to answer the question. ▪ Notice important words in the question that tell you what needs to be in your answer. For example: when/time, why/reason, how/explanation, what/a thing or event, not/an opposite, and number words/how many. ▪ Begin your answer by restating the question. Then, write your answer in complete sentences.
Vocabulary (Context)	▪ This type of vocabulary question requires you to figure out the meaning of a word from the sentences near the word. ▪ Read the sentences surrounding the word and look for clues about the word's meaning. ▪ Try the selected answer choice in place of the word in the sentence.
Vocabulary (Matching)	▪ This type of vocabulary question requires you to match each word to a definition, synonym, or antonym. ▪ Word parts such as a prefixes or suffixes often give clues to the meaning of a word. ▪ Check to see if there is a smaller word you already know in the word.
Main Idea	▪ The main idea is a statement that tells what the story is mostly about. ▪ All the answer choices could be true, but only one is the main idea; the others are often just key details. ▪ Read each answer choice and decide if it's a detail or the main idea.
Fact and Opinion	▪ A fact can be proven true or false; an opinion is a belief or judgment. ▪ Look for clue words that signal fact: proven, documented, scientifically, or words that signal opinion: think, feel, should, best/worst.
Cause and Effect	▪ The cause is why something happened; the effect is what happened. ▪ Look for clue words that signal cause: because, when, if, or words that signal effect: therefore, then, so.

Compare and Contrast	- Think about how things are alike (compare) and different (contrast). - Look for clue words that signal comparison: both, alike, also, or words that signal contrast: differ, but, unlike, less/more than.
Author's Purpose	- Why did the author write this? - Common purposes are to persuade, to inform, or to entertain. - Look for words that signal persuasion: should, best/worst clearly, words that signal information: state, report, is/was/are, or words that signal entertainment: tell, imagine, funny.
Graphical Information	- These questions use charts, graphs, maps, tables, timelines, diagrams, etc. - Carefully examine all the elements of the graphic and try to find connections in the text.
Making Inferences	- An inferential question often requires you to put together pieces of information in the story to find the answer. Sometimes, it may require you to use information you already know from outside the story. - The answer is not directly in the text, so you may need to search for clues in the story. - Draw a conclusion based on facts from the story. - Say, "I think the answer is _____ because the author told me _____." - Begin your answer by restating the question. Then, write your answer in complete sentences.
Retelling and Summarizing	- The summary question requires you to write either: - A short sentence that contains the common idea in each of the three listed facts. - Three facts from the story that support a summary statement. - Reread your answer to be sure you used your own words and only ideas from this story.

Note: Another source to consult for designing effective comprehension instruction is the IES Practice Guide: Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade, (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512029.pdf>), which explains the following five recommendations in depth):

1. Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies.
2. Teach students to identify and use the text's organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content.
3. Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text.
4. Select texts purposefully to support comprehension development.
5. Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension.

See page 1 of the practice guide for a quick-reference sheet regarding the five recommendations.