



# Comprehension

**What it is:** Comprehension is understanding what you have read. At the most basic level, it's knowing the name of the characters or events in a story or learning basic facts from an informational book. At an advanced level, it's being able to apply what you have read to a real situation. Comprehension allows the reader to think deeply about what they have read and that is the goal of all reading.

**What it's not:** Just sounding out words and saying them without thinking about what they mean in that sentence or paragraph.

**Why it's important:** We read to understand.

**Ways to help your child:** Children may have comprehension problems for a variety of reasons. First of all, students with poor decoding skills misread many words, which makes it hard to understand what they are reading. If this is the case, students need help with phonics skills. Other students are able to decode the words, but read so slowly they cannot think about what they are reading. For these students, fluency work is helpful.

Some students sound like they are reading just fine, but they don't seem to remember what they have read and cannot answer questions about the text. For these students, the problem may be lack of general knowledge about the topic and/or lack of comprehension strategies for thinking about the text before, during, and after reading. Finally, some students are struggling with all areas. This packet will focus on comprehension strategies.

**Strategies:** These strategies will help your child with comprehension.

**Choose the Right Book** – Books for BEGINNING INDEPENDENT READERS are intended to build their ability to sound out words fluently. They are NOT great in terms of story line or factual content, and that's okay because a really interesting book would be too hard for them to read at that point. The best practice on comprehension will be with fiction and non-fiction texts that have a great story or provide rich information.

**For BEGINNING readers, the best time to work on comprehension is when you are reading to them. Read aloud to your child and talk about the text EVERYDAY, even after they are able to read on their own.**

The other important point is to choose books based on your child's interests. It will be much easier for your child to develop comprehension skills if they are interested in the topic.

**Ask the right questions** – Aim for higher-order questions, especially those that ask students to make connections between the text and themselves, other texts, and the world around them. Ask a variety of question types, using the chart below.

<b>Remember</b>	<b>Understand</b>	<b>Apply</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who?</li> <li>• Where?</li> <li>• Which one?</li> <li>• What?</li> <li>• Why?</li> <li>• How much?</li> <li>• When?</li> <li>• What does that mean?</li> <li>• What happened next?</li> <li>• Which is the best one?</li> <li>• Can you name all of the...?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does that mean?</li> <li>• What are the facts?</li> <li>• Tell me in your own words.</li> <li>• Is this the same as...?</li> <li>• Give an example.</li> <li>• Explain why...</li> <li>• What expectations are there?</li> <li>• What does the graph tell us?</li> <li>• What are they saying?</li> <li>• What seems to be...?</li> <li>• Which statements support..."</li> <li>• What could have happened?</li> <li>• Does everyone think like ___?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predict what would happen if...?</li> <li>• What would change if...?</li> <li>• Tell how that happened?</li> <li>• How would you explain...?</li> <li>• Who do you think?</li> <li>• What could he/she do differently?</li> <li>• What else might have happened?</li> <li>• What was the main idea?</li> <li>• Tell me more about....</li> <li>• Explain why ___ did that.</li> <li>• What would you ask the character ___?</li> <li>• Explain why ___ acted the way they did.</li> <li>• What do they have in common?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Analyze</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Evaluate</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does ___ do for ___?</li> <li>• What is fact? Opinion?</li> <li>• What is ___ assuming?</li> <li>• What is the motive?</li> <li>• What does the author believe?</li> <li>• What is ___'s point of view?</li> <li>• What is the relationship between ___ and ___?</li> <li>• What is the theme?</li> <li>• How is the author convincing you to believe that ___?</li> <li>• What could not have happened if ___?</li> <li>• How is ___ similar to ___?</li> <li>• Why did ___ changes happen?</li> <li>• What are some of the problems ___faced?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What doesn't make sense?</li> <li>• What did you learn that is the same as what you learned in ___?</li> <li>• Is there a better solution?</li> <li>• What do you think about ___?</li> <li>• Do you think ___ is good or bad and why?</li> <li>• How would you have handled ___?</li> <li>• Do you believe ___?</li> <li>• How would you feel if ___?</li> <li>• What are the consequences of ___?</li> <li>• What influence does ___ have on your life?</li> <li>• What are the pros and cons of ___?</li> <li>• Who will gain and who will lose?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you design a ___ to show ___?</li> <li>• What is another way the story could have ended?</li> <li>• If you were ___ what would you have done instead and why?</li> <li>• Think of three different ways we could use what we learned from this book.</li> <li>• If you were in charge of ___ what would you change so that ___?</li> </ul>

Adapted from the following sources: Pohl, Michael. *Learning to Think, Thinking to Learn: Models and Strategies to Develop a Classroom Culture of Thinking*. Cheltenham, Vic.: Hawker Brownlow. 2000; Tarlington, Denise. "Bloom's Revised Taxonomy." Powerpoint; [www.center.iupui.edu/ctl/idd/docs/Bloom\\_revised021.doc](http://www.center.iupui.edu/ctl/idd/docs/Bloom_revised021.doc), February 8, 2006; [http://eprntice.sdsu.edu/J03OJ/miles/Bloomtaxonomy\(revised\)1.htm](http://eprntice.sdsu.edu/J03OJ/miles/Bloomtaxonomy(revised)1.htm), WCPSS AG Program 2009 Toolbox for Planning Rigorous Instruction

**Talk About the Book!** – The best strategy is to have meaningful conversations with your child about each book. Help them make connections to their own experiences, to other books they have read, and to the world around them.



**Talk About What Good Readers Do** – Honor the ways your child demonstrates the traits of good readers. Use a Comprehension Monitor and Mend bookmark to remind your child and yourself of all the skills good readers use. It is important to pay attention to what you are reading about and use “fix up” strategies like re-reading if something doesn't make sense.

Comprehension Monitor and Mend	
What Good Readers Do	Fix-Up Strategies
1 Think about what is known about topic	1. Reread the passage.
2 Know purpose for reading	2. Read ahead and see if it makes sense.
3 Preview text	3. Adjust reading rate (e.g., slow down).
4 Make and check predictions	4. Identify unknown words (e.g., sound out, break into parts, use context clues, look up in dictionary).
5 Visualize or create mental images	5. Other:
6 Ask and answer questions	
7 Make inferences	
8 Monitor understanding	
9 Use “fix-up” strategies when unable to understand text	
10 Identify main ideas and summarize	

**Write About It** – Writing about what is being read is actually a great way to improve comprehension or understanding. Help your child take a few notes while they are reading. Even making a quick sketch of something from a story or information book can make a big difference.

T = Hummingbirds

- small

- egg like a jellybean
- baby - size of a bee
- adult - 2 inches, weighs less than a penny
- can stand on a blade of grass

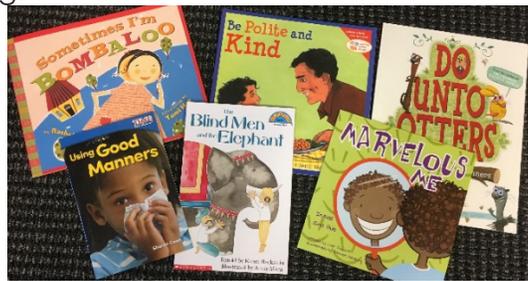
- moves

- can hang in midair
- wings beat 60 times a second
- strong wings make noise
- can fly up, down, and backwards for 500 miles

**Share Chapter Books** – Longer books help students to develop sustained attention, which leads to better comprehension. If your child cannot read chapter books independently, read them together and stop occasionally to discuss what you are reading.

**Sequencing** – Help your child to sequence, or put in order, detailed events in real life using words like first, next, then, last, finally, in the beginning, at the end. Then, use those words to remember the order of events from something they have read.

**Think Aloud** – When you are reading aloud to your child, talk about what you are thinking. For example, you might say, “I wonder if the boy will find the dog?” or “It’s interesting that the author said the boy was trembling but he didn’t say why he was frightened. She must want to keep us wondering.”



### **When Reading FICTION Books (stories)**

Before reading: Point out the author and title. Ask, what do you think this book will be about? Tell your child that a story will have characters (who the story is about), a setting (where the story takes place), and a plot (what the story is about). It will have a beginning, middle, and end.

While reading: Stop several times to talk about what is happening and to ask your child’s opinion. Talk about the characters and the setting. Make predictions about what will happen next.

After reading: Ask your child to retell the story from memory. Ask them to make connections between this story and other books they have read, situations that have occurred in their lives, or to the world around them.

### **When Reading NON-FICTION Books (informational texts)**

Before reading: Point out the author and title but also the headings (big bold print) of each section. Talk about what you might learn from reading this book. Tell your child that informational books can be about anything. You can learn a lot about the world by reading non-fiction books. You can read the whole book from front to back, or you can read sections that are of special interest to you. Help your child notice the table of contents and the glossary if there is one.

While reading: Pause to talk about the illustrations. In non-fiction books, the drawings, pictures, diagrams, and labeling really add to the content. Take time to study them and talk about how the illustrator used them to give the reader more information.

After reading: Ask your child what was most interesting about the book. What do they want to learn more about?

**Teach Signal Words** – Signal words are important words that improve comprehension of what we are reading. There are several categories of words. Help your child understand these common signal words.

**1. Continuation Signals (Warning—there are more ideas to come.)**

and	also	another
again	and finally	first of all
a final reason	too	in addition
last of all	secondly	more
one reason	next	

**2. Change-of-Direction Signals (Watch out—we're doubling back or changing.)**

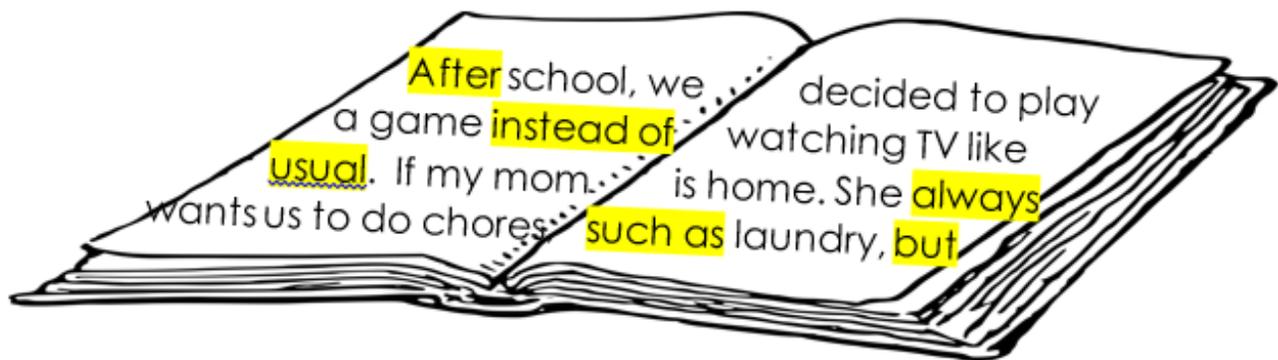
although	but	instead of	yet
despite	different from	even though	on the other hand
however	in contrast	while	still
in spite of	though	otherwise	on the contrary

**3. Sequence Signals (These words mean there is an order to these ideas.)**

first, second, third	in the first place	then	last
next	after	before	for one thing

**4. Time Signals (When is it happening?)**

when	during	now
lately	already	little by little
at the same time	once	after awhile



**5. Illustration Signals (Here's what that really means.)**

for example	for instance	to illustrate
such as	in the same way as	similar to

**6. Emphasis Signals (*This is important.*)**

most of all	above all	should be
of course	remember that	by the way
a key feature	more than anything else	a major event
the basic concept	especially important	pay attention to

**7. Cause, Condition, or Result Signals (*Condition or modification is coming up.*)**

because	if	so that	of
for	from	yet	so
while	then	unless	but
that	until	due to	since
as	whether		

**8. Spatial Signals (*This answers the “where” question.*)**

between	below	about	left	above
here	outside	around	close to	far
right	over	away	side	near
near	in	into	beside	toward
middle	next to	beyond	north	west
east	on	opposite	over	by
south	there	inside	in front of	upon
under	these	out	behind	across

**9. Comparison-Contrast Signals (*We will now compare idea A with idea B.*)**

and	or	also	but	like
too	best	most	still	while
either	less	less than	yet	though
more than	same	better	however	
even	then	half	although	

**10. Conclusion Signals (*This ends the discussion and may have special importance.*)**

as a result	last of all	finally	consequently
in summary	therefore	in conclusion	from this we see

Signal Words Adapted From: Fry, E. B., Kress, J. E., & Fountoukidis, D.L. (1993). *The reading teacher's book of lists*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, pp.185-187. © 1993 by Prentice Hall

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