

10 Steps to Better Comprehension

As stories and textbooks get more complex, your child will need more advanced comprehension skills to understand what he reads. Whether he's reading a novel for his language arts class or non-fiction for science or history, he can sharpen his skills using these ideas.



Exploring fiction

The longer books your child is reading now are likely to have more plot twists and characters to follow. Try these suggestions to help him keep the story straight as he reads.

1. Preview

Knowing what to expect can make following the plot easier. Encourage your youngster to get a feel for a book before she begins. She might read the back cover or inside flap or search an online bookstore for a plot summary.

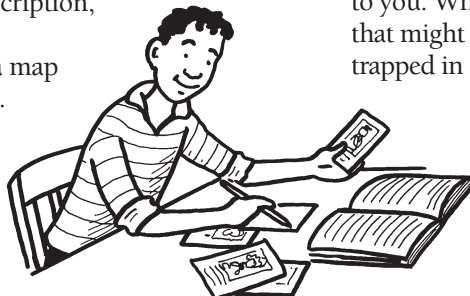


Then, suggest that she ask herself questions. *Examples:* What does the title mean? What kind of problems will the characters face? Considering the answers will get her thinking about plot possibilities.

2. Imagine

A strong reader learns to “see” a story in his mind. After your child reads, encourage him to draw pictures to help him visualize characters and settings. For example, he might make character “trading cards.” He can draw a picture of the character on one side of an index card and write information about the person (name, age, physical description, interesting facts) on the back.

Or your youngster could make a map to help him picture a book's setting. He might draw places mentioned in the story, such as the main character's tent in the jungle and the river where the villagers wash their clothes.



3. Use clues

Sometimes an author comes right out and says what's happening in the story. Other times, your child has to figure it out. Say the author plants clues, such as “Margaret watched Ellie walk away with the popular girls” and “Ellie hadn't called Margaret for a week.” Your youngster might infer that Ellie doesn't want to be friends with Margaret anymore.

Help her learn how to draw conclusions. Write a couple of clues (“The dragon tiptoed toward Jimmy as gently as possible,” “He felt sad when people ran away”). Your child can make an inference (“This is a friendly dragon”).

4. Connect

When your child relates to characters, settings, and events, a story makes more sense to him. Who does the main character remind him of? Has he visited a place similar to the setting?

Your youngster can practice making these connections by creating a two-column list. As he reads, have him write characters, settings, and events in one column. In the other column, he can put personal connections. For *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* by Sharon Creech, he might write “Making special family recipes with Granny Torrelli cheers Rosie up” on one side of his list and “Baking cookies with my grandma makes me happy” in the other column.

5. Predict

Readers with good comprehension skills try to predict what is going to happen. Ask your child to read a chapter of her book to you. When she reaches the end, have her predict three things that might happen next. For example, if the main character is trapped in a fire, your youngster might predict that the character will put out the fire, climb out of a window, or be rescued.

Have her choose the prediction she thinks is most likely to come true and write it on a sticky note. Let her do this for each chapter. When she finishes the book, she can compare her predictions to the story developments.

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Tackling nonfiction

Reading nonfiction will deepen your child's understanding of the subjects he's learning about in school. Here are strategies he can use to make sure he gets the most out of textbooks and other nonfiction books.

6. Look at headings

Before starting a chapter, suggest that your youngster skim all the titles and headings. He could write each heading as a question and then read for the answers. For instance, the heading "Plants use photosynthesis" might become "What is photosynthesis, and how does it work?" Having questions in mind will help him find the information he needs to learn.

7. Check for understanding

Suggest that your child pause after each paragraph and consider what she has read. Does she understand the information? She can test her knowledge by writing a one-sentence summary of the paragraph. ("Photosynthesis is how plants change sunlight into sugars that they use for food.") At the end of the textbook chapter or book, she'll have a recap that she can use to study.



Ready, set, remember!



A big part of reading comprehension is being able to remember information. Give your child's memory a boost by suggesting these ideas when she reads a textbook:

- Read one small chunk of text at a time, such as a paragraph or section.
- Cover the text that you just read with your hand or a piece of paper. Retell the information in your own words. You might say it to another person (a parent or a study buddy, for example).
- Jot down the main ideas and a few supporting details. Writing down the information will help you remember it.
- Answer the questions at the end of each section. Try to answer them without looking back at the text.
- Make up a quiz. Include true-false and multiple-choice questions as well as essay questions.

8. Focus on graphics

Remind your youngster to review the charts, tables, graphs, and other illustrations in each section. He should also look at photos and read their captions carefully. These text features can make complicated ideas easier to grasp by helping him view the information in different ways. For example, a map in his social studies book might help him understand where Lewis and Clark traveled on their expedition and how far they went.

9. Define bold words

As your child reads, she should pay special attention to words in bold or italic print. If she comes across one that's unfamiliar, she can look it up in the glossary or in a dictionary. It's likely to be important to her understanding of the section she's reading. When she finishes the chapter or book, she could flip back through, write down each bold word, and define them in her own words. This will help her remember the terms and their meanings.

10. Read further

Encourage your youngster to read a different book on the same topic or on a related topic. For instance, if he's reading about the Declaration of Independence in his history textbook, he might read a biography of Thomas Jefferson. Or if he's reading a library book on medieval knights, he might also check out a book about castles. He'll broaden his understanding and gain a different perspective.

