



# Reading Comprehension Concepts

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## Reading Comprehension

*The best way to improve your reading efficiency is to read a lot.*

### ***Reading Is Important***

A 1993 investigation revealed that 40 to 44 million Americans had only the most basic reading and writing skills (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993). Another 50 million Americans not only lacked the skills to function successfully in a literate society, but also were not aware of their inadequacies. These statistics make it obvious that we have to look for new approaches to prepare students for the millennium, especially in light of current job market trends.

The job market now demands a workforce that is more highly educated than ever. For example, assembly line workers must interpret manuals in addition to operating machinery. These workers must be able to read, write, analyze, interpret, and synthesize information (Hay & Roberts, 1989). In summary, people just aren't reading as much anymore and yet the need for reading, comprehension, and communication skills (verbal and written) has increased. The need is great for strengthening the following skills:

- Your ability to read a variety of materials (e.g. textbooks, novels, newspapers, magazines, instructional manuals).
- Your ability to understand and remember what you read.
- Your ability to effectively communicate what you've learned from your reading.

### ***Motivation Is Necessary***

Engaged, active readers have deep-seated motivational goals, which include being committed to the subject matter, wanting to learn the content, believing in one's own ability, and wanting to share understandings from learning. However, most people, children and adults, do not spend any significant portion of their free time reading. Without committing time to reading, no one can gain the reading skills or knowledge they need to succeed in school, at work, or in life in general.

## **Reading is the active search for answers!**

### ***What is Reading Comprehension?***

According to Webster's Dictionary, comprehension is "the capacity for understanding fully; the act or action of grasping with the intellect." Webster also tells us that reading is "to receive or take in the sense of (as letters or symbols) by scanning; to understand the meaning of written or printed matter; to learn from what one has seen or found in writing or printing.

*Comprehension = understanding!*

Identifying words on a page does not make someone a successful reader. When the words are understood and transcend the pages to become thoughts and ideas then you are truly reading. Comprehension therefore is the capacity for understanding those thoughts and ideas. Applying what you have read and understood becomes the successful conclusion.



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When you comprehend what you read it is like taking a trip around the world, staying as long as you like, visiting all the places you wish, and you never even having to pack a suitcase! Reading can be an escape that takes you outside the bounds of your existence. Reading is your ticket to whatever you choose to do and become. Reading is your future as well as your past. Don't be a reader who reads without thinking or who reads without a purpose.

## ***Comprehension Regulation***

You can become an active, effective reader through comprehension regulation. This is a method for consciously controlling the reading process. Comprehension regulation involves the use of preplanned strategies to understand text. It is a plan for getting the most out of reading. It allows you to have an idea of what to expect from the text. Most importantly, it gives you techniques to use when you are experiencing difficulties.

As an active reader, you can get an idea of what the writer is trying to communicate by:

- Setting goals based on your purpose for reading
- Previewing the text to make predictions
- Self-questioning
- Scanning
- Relating new information to old

## ***Determining your Purpose:***

There are many different purposes for reading. Sometimes you read a text to learn material, sometimes you read for pure pleasure, and sometimes you need to follow a set of directions. As a student, much of your reading will be to learn assigned material. You get information from everything you read and yet you don't read everything for the same reason or in the same way or at the same rate. Each purpose or reason for reading requires a different reading approach. Two things that influence how fast and how well you read are the characteristics of the text and the characteristics of you, the reader.

Characteristics of the text:

- Size and style of the type (font)
- Pictures and illustrations
- Author's writing style and personal perspectives
- Difficulty of the ideas presented

Characteristics of the reader:

- Background knowledge (how much you already know about the material or related concepts)
- Reading ability - vocabulary and comprehension
- Interest
- Attitude

Skills for being an effective reader and for increasing comprehension are:

- Finding main ideas and supporting details/evidence
- Making inferences and drawing conclusions



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- Recognizing a text's patterns of organization
- Perceiving conceptual relationships
- Testing your knowledge and understanding of the material through application

When comprehension fails, or your understanding seems limited, you can use a plan that includes:

- Using structural analysis and contextual clues to identify unknown vocabulary words (e.g., look at roots, prefixes, suffixes). If this fails, keep a dictionary close by and look up words you don't understand
- Reading more critically - ask questions while you read
- Summarizing or outlining main points and supporting details
- Rereading the material
- Do a "think aloud" and/or try to explain what you've read to someone else

Although, reading means different things to different people and skills vary with every individual, reading is a skill that can be improved. Students from various backgrounds are in reading courses for a variety of reasons. Weaknesses in vocabulary, comprehension, speed, or a combination of all three may be the result of ineffective reading habits. Active reading is engaged reading and can be achieved through comprehension regulation strategies.