

COMPREHENSION

What is comprehension?

At a Glance

Reading comprehension is understanding and making sense of a text through the use of decoding, background knowledge and verbal reasoning. It is a dynamic process of both extracting and creating meaning through a transaction with the text that requires a range of both language and cognitive processes.

According to the Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide: Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade (ESSA Levels III & IV), “The current research on reading indicates that the following types of skills and knowledge are critical to building a young student’s capacity to comprehend what he or she reads: word level skills, vocabulary knowledge and oral language skills, broad conceptual knowledge, knowledge and abilities required specifically to comprehend text, thinking and reasoning skills and motivation to understand and work toward academic goals.”

Students must be explicitly taught actions skilled readers intentionally take before, during and after their interaction with a text. Understanding does not result from merely reading the words on the page, but rather meaning must be actively constructed. It is crucial to provide guidance on how to use strategies to enhance comprehension. When students grasp that employing these tools aid in understanding the ideas in a text, it makes reading more meaningful and purposeful.

Strategy instruction enhances (not produces) comprehension by teaching students intentional ways of thinking when reading to help them better understand the information in the text.

Recommendations for the Classroom

- Establish a purpose, eliciting or supplying background knowledge prior to reading a new text.
- Teach students how to simultaneously use reading comprehension strategies that will help them understand and retain what they read, through authentic text interactions around a single topic, not as isolated skills.
- Teach students to use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn and remember content.
- Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text, modeling ways to think about the text and topic that can help students when they are reading independently.
- Select texts purposefully to support instructional goals and improve comprehension development.*
- Practice comprehension strategies by gradual release of responsibility in a context in which learning the content of the text (not the strategy) is prioritized rather than through repetition and reinforcement via worksheets and isolated practice. See Building Knowledge At a Glance.
- Establish an engaging and motivating context for teaching reading by clearly conveying the purpose of each lesson, explaining how comprehension strategies increase learning, and helping students recognize their powerful role in becoming successful readers.

Evidence of these instructional practices should be present in High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs). When gaps are identified in HQIRs, supplement practices to ensure all recommendations are carried out.

**Note of Clarification:*

Leveled and decodable texts do not typically support instructional goals focused on comprehension. While these types of texts provide opportunities to make meaning, they generally are not sources of academic language or knowledge building, which are key components of complex texts used for developing comprehension and analysis. Decodable texts are intended to support students in learning independent word recognition skills and developing fluency, not directly improving comprehension development.

Alignment to the Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing

The ability to effectively use the required language and cognitive processes needed to be a skilled reader (to comprehend text) are informed by the interaction of the reader, text, task and context. Skilled reading occurs when meaning is made. In simplest terms, it happens when a reader comprehends. This way of thinking considers comprehension a product, or outcome, of reading. However, comprehension is also a process. There is no meaning-making without cognitive processes being at work. The processes and products of comprehension are infused throughout the *Kentucky Academic Standards for Reading and Writing*.

The infusion of comprehension as a process and product is most evident in the multidimensionality view of the Reading Literature (RL), Reading Informational (RI) Text, Composition (C) and Language (L) strands. This view identifies layers within each standard. Recognizing these layers allows a clearer look at the part(s) of the standard that engage students in the process of comprehension and the part(s) that expect students to use the process to reach a product (outcome) of comprehension. For instance, in RL.3.3, the ability to describe characters and how they affect the plot of a story is a product (outcome) of comprehension. An example of comprehension as a process is found in RL.3.1. when students ask and answer questions to construct meaning from the text. The process of asking and answering questions is what leads to understanding, and thus comprehension as a process.

Comprehension products should be evidence of deeper understanding of text, typically of complex text. Evidence may include, but is not limited to, analysis, discussion or an explanation of the relationship between information from two or more texts on the same topic. Therefore, reading comprehension instruction should be embedded within lessons that primarily focus on building knowledge and promote the ability to gain knowledge from written material. The RL, RI, L and C strands provide multiple opportunities to learn from text.

Comprehension At a Glance References