

Active Reading Strategies

Skilled readers use a variety of active reading strategies to help them make meaning from a text. Knowing what you need to get out of your reading will help you choose the appropriate reading and learning strategy to maximize comprehension and reading efficiency.

What are Active Reading Strategies?

Active reading strategies are the mental processes that highly effective readers use when approaching reading. These reading strategies require a reader to read critically by focusing on the material to understand and actively engage with the material by being aware of one's own thought process when reading. Through active reading readers gain greater critical thinking skills that makes things easier to understand and enables readers to retain information for a longer period of time.

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| Adjusting Reading Rate | Readers use a constant rate for most materials they read but learn to use different speeds based on the types of tasks and their purpose for reading (e.g. slowing down to comprehend new information, or speeding up to scan for key words.) |
| Annotating | Marking and highlighting a text during reading is a way for readers to stay engaged with a reading and comprehend the reading at a deeper level. Readers record responses to the text during the act of reading and write ideas and personal comments in the margins. |
| Author's Purpose | Being aware of the author's purpose allows a reader to understand the reason and intent of the writing. Different purposes, such as those written to entertain, inform, or advertise have particular characteristics. |
| Chunking | Breaking information down in small sections allows the reader to comprehend and retain information more easily. This learning strategy makes it easier for students to keep information in their short term memory and has been shown to improve students reading comprehension and fluency. |
| Connecting | Readers connect prior knowledge to new information by making connections between text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to- world. |
| Consulting a Reference | Readers use a dictionary, thesaurus, reference chart or glossary to help find word meanings/pronunciations or background information. |
| Determining Importance | Readers distinguish between what information in a text is most important versus what information is interesting but not necessary for understanding. Knowing the primary purpose of reading a textbooks and nonfiction is important to determine importance. |
| Evaluating | The reader forms an opinion and judgment about the writing--e.g., whether the argument (if there is one) is well or poorly structured, supported, or detailed; whether the writing style is appropriate, efficient, or well-toned--whether the audience is appropriately addressed; or if the author is biased in any way and how this may have affected the writing. |
| Graphic Organizer | Readers use a visual or graphic organizer to construct meaning. These organizers help readers visualize how ideas fit together and help identify strengths and weakness of thought processes. Outlines and concept maps are two ways to organize textual information. |

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| Inferring | Readers make inferences when they think use clues from the text and their own experience to figure out what they have read. The result is that they form a conclusion or create new meaning that is not stated in the reading. |
| Paraphrasing | Readers re-state and re-write text in their own words to capture the main focus of the reading. This strategy forces readers to pay close attention to the author's ideas and helps improve the readers' level of understanding. |
| Predicting | Readers make predictions or "best guesses" about what will happen next. Predictions are based on the prior knowledge and experience about the topic. |
| Previewing | Readers look over the reading material in order to become familiar with topic and organization before actually beginning to read it. This helps make the reading an easier, faster, and more effective learning experience. |
| Prior Knowledge | The readers consider information they already know about a topic to make connections to the article before they read it. This connection enables readers to understand the topic better and at a deeper level. |
| Monitoring Comprehension | Readers recognize when they don't understand parts of a text and take necessary steps to restore meaning. Monitoring includes asking clarifying questions if something remains unclear, rereading if there is some confusion, looking for answers and adjust reading strategy to understand material. |
| Reading On | Readers skip unfamiliar word(s) and read further to provide sufficient context needed to determine unknown word. |
| Re-Reading | A reader re-reads text again for deeper understanding, word identification and fluency. |
| Scanning | The readers looks through a text to locate specific information without reading everything, e.g. names, dates, illustrations, etc. |
| Synthesizing | Readers piece together and combine information from their own knowledge of how life works and the way they see it along with the information they have gathered and understood from the text to create their own perspective and original insight. |
| Questioning | Readers engage with the text by asking questions about the text and the author's intentions, and then seek information to clarify and extend their thinking before, during and after reading. Questioning helps to clarify meaning, promote comprehension, and extend understanding. |
| Skimming | The readers looks quickly through material to gain an overall view of text without reading everything. |
| Summarizing | Readers reduces larger texts to focus on important elements by identifying key elements and condense important information into their own words to solidify meaning. |
| Visualizing | Readers create images in their minds that reflect or represent the ideas in the text. These images may include any of the five senses and serve to enhance understanding of the text. |

* For more information on active reading strategies: see *The Active Reading Process* handout.