

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 2 from the WWC practice guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Reading**
GRADE LEVEL(S): **4–12**
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Strong**

Recommendation

Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.

Direct and explicit instruction focused on comprehension strategies improves students' reading comprehension. Comprehension strategies are specific actions or tools readers use to increase their understanding of texts. Classroom comprehension activities might include students using graphic organizers, summarizing, paraphrasing, or identifying main ideas. Direct and explicit instruction involves teachers modeling strategies, explaining why strategies help comprehension, and telling students when to use specific strategies. Teachers then provide students with support and feedback as they begin to apply strategies.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Show students how to apply the strategies they are learning to different texts, not just to one text.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Expose students to a wide variety of both nonfiction and narrative text.
- Guide students to utilize learned comprehension strategies with both nonfiction and narrative text.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.RC.13, RL.P4, RI.RC.12, RI.P.4

TEACHER: INST.PIC.3

Have students utilize learned strategies with varying text styles. This experience will provide them with the opportunity to think critically about which comprehension strategies work best in different situations.

2. Use direct and explicit instruction for teaching students how to use comprehension strategies.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Explicitly teach comprehension strategies and provide the rationale for when to use a specific strategy.
- Provide regular, ongoing feedback to students as they independently utilize a specific comprehension strategy.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: I.3, I.5, RL.LCS.10, RI.LCS.10

TEACHER: INST.LSP.2

Research has shown that knowledge of reading comprehension strategies alone does not result in students applying strategies independently. In addition to knowledge of strategies, students must also understand why strategies are important and when to use them. Direct and explicit instruction is very detailed about what strategy to use, why to use it, and how to use it. Feedback is provided to students as they begin to apply strategies independently.

3. Provide the appropriate amount of guided practice depending on the difficulty level of the strategies that the students are learning.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Based on the complexity of the comprehension strategy, provide the appropriate amount of guidance to promote the student's application of strategies independently.
- Apply a gradual release of responsibility by modeling the use of the strategy, then teaching the strategy with small groups of students, providing less support to pairs of students, and ultimately, promoting individual practice.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.RC.13, RL.P.4, RI.RC.12, RI.P.4

TEACHER: INST.MS.3, INST.LSP.3, INST.GS.1, INST.GS.2, INST.GS.3, INST.GS.4, INST.TKS.3

Different comprehension strategies require varying amounts of time to learn. Some strategies can be learned from one demonstration, while others are more complex. For more complex strategies, start student practice in small groups with high levels of teacher support, then release the students into pairs and provide less support. Finally, have students practice independently.

4. When teaching comprehension strategies, make sure students understand that the goal is to understand the content of the text.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Explicitly teach students the importance of applying key comprehension strategies to understand the content of the text.
- Promote the use of reading strategies to improve overall reading comprehension.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.RC.13, RL.P.4, RI.RC.12, RI.P.4

TEACHER: INST.PIC.3, INST.PS.1

Reading comprehension strategies are a tool for supporting a better overall understanding of a text. Sometimes a focus on teaching specific strategies can distract students from overall text comprehension. Frequently remind yourself and students that improved reading comprehension is the goal, not just using strategies.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Many teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies.</i>	<p>Teachers may find it difficult to confidently model how they use strategies to comprehend text because it is something they do automatically. Additionally, many educator preparation programs do not cover teaching reading comprehension strategies.</p> <p>Professional development that includes opportunities for teachers to practice and receive feedback will help them develop the knowledge and skills required to provide explicit instruction on reading comprehension skills.</p>
<i>Teachers from some content areas do not feel responsible for teaching reading comprehension strategies.</i>	<p>The goal of teaching reading comprehension strategies is to increase a student's ability to understand texts in all contents. Therefore, the time taken to teach comprehension strategies will be regained as students become more effective content learners, resulting in better student performance in all content areas.</p>
<i>Teachers and students become too focused on specific comprehension strategies versus improved overall comprehension.</i>	<p>Stay clear and focused on the goal of increased comprehension. When teaching strategies, be purposeful in the application. Additionally, the effectiveness of different strategies will depend not only on context but also on student preferences as well. Frequently remind yourself and your students that improved reading comprehension is the goal and there is no one right way to get there.</p>

Reference: Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices (NCEE 2008-4027). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/8>