

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 3d from the WWC practice guide *Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9*. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Reading**  
GRADE LEVEL(S): **4–9**  
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Strong**

## Recommendation

# Teach students to monitor their comprehension as they read.

Students may not know when they do not understand what they are reading. For some students, reading has always felt like a task to complete, but not a task that helped them learn about a topic. However, in grades 4–9, students need to gain information from what they read. Students need to learn to be aware of their own comprehension and determine whether a section of text is making sense to them. One of the first steps in building awareness is being able to say, “I don’t understand this.”

When students monitor for understanding as they read, they can recognize whether the text is making sense to them. There are several actions students can take when they figure out that they are not understanding the text. These actions can help students make sense of the text.

This part of Recommendation 3 focuses on teaching students to determine if they are understanding the text, to ask themselves questions to check their understanding, and to take actions to make sense of the text. The recommendation also teaches students to reflect on their learning.

## How to carry out the recommendation

1. Help students determine when they do not understand the text.

### Instructional strategies from the examples

- Have students practice determining if a text makes sense using isolated sentences or nonsense sentences.
- Have students mark words or parts of the sentence that do not make sense.
- Discuss the parts of the sentences that are not making sense and provide feedback on student thinking.

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- After practice with isolated sentences, move on to longer pieces of text with multiple sentences.

### South Carolina standards alignment

**ELA:** 6-8.I.5, 9-12.I.5, 3-5.RL.MC.5, 6-8.RL.MC.5, 9-12.RL.MC.5, 3-5.RI.MC.5, 6-8.RI.MC.5, 9-12.RI.MC.5

**TEACHER:** INST.TKS.1, INST.TKS.3

To help students become more comfortable with acknowledging when portions of a text do not make sense to them, have students practice with isolated sentences. This activity includes some nonsensical sentences to help students get in the habit of asking themselves, “Does this make sense to me?” The teacher asks students to read a sentence and determine if it makes sense. If the sentence does not make sense, the teacher tells students to mark (e.g., underline or highlight) the word they cannot read or do not understand or the portions of the sentence that do not make sense. Discuss the statements students were not able to understand and which parts caused the problem. Help students think through what they can do when they do not understand a word or phrase.

After students have practiced identifying whether or not what they read makes sense at the sentence level, move on to longer pieces of text with multiple sentences.

#### Sample student sheet: Does it make sense?

1. The Olympic games began almost 3,000 years ago on the sun.	Yes	No
2. When the first Europeans arrived in North America, native Americans played grapes like football.	Yes	No
3. At the library you can find books on any sport you are interested in.	Yes	No
4. Many people watch sports on TV for their exercise.	Yes	No
5. A student athlete goes to school and practices every day.	Yes	No
6. If you can do a cartwheel, a handstand, or the splits then you can do gymnastics.	Yes	No
7. Basketball and skateboarding are two fairly new stores that began in the United States.	Yes	No
8. Many schools have a gym from students of exercise.	Yes	No

2. Teach students to ask themselves questions as they read to check their understanding and figure out what the text is about.

### **Instructional strategies from the examples**

- Teach students to stop and ask themselves what the section is about to determine if it makes sense.
- Model reading a passage and asking whether it makes sense.
- Read text as a group and ask the group periodically what the passage is about and whether it makes sense.
- Record student reading and have them listen to earlier attempts to demonstrate growth.
- Have students share with other students the questions they are asking themselves.

### **South Carolina standards alignment**

**ELA:** 3-5.RL.MC.5, 6-8.RL.MC.5, 9-12.RL.MC.5, 3-5.RI.MC.5, 6-8.RI.MC.5, 9-12.RI.MC.5

**TEACHER:** INST.AM.5, INST.Q.8, INST.PS.1

Teach students to stop periodically and ask themselves what the section of text is about or what the gist statement is for the section of text. When they think about what the section is about, they can figure out whether what they are reading is making sense. If they do not understand, they can reread the section slowly and carefully, if necessary. They can also figure out which words are stumping them or try to think about what they know about the topic.

Model how you would read a passage and ask yourself questions aloud as you read. This will help students hear how asking questions and thinking about the words in the text can help them make sense of the text.

Read the text as a group and stop periodically to ask the group to think about whether they are understanding the text and what they can do to address their misunderstandings. Ask students the questions they should ask themselves and support them in answering the questions. Use prompts and questions to help students move toward independence in asking themselves questions. When necessary, prompt students by pointing out specific sentences that might be confusing.

As students become more comfortable asking themselves questions, have them work in pairs or small groups to read the next paragraph and share how they asked

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themselves questions during the reading. Have students talk about the questions they asked and whether those questions prompted them to do something to address their understanding.

### Possible questions students can ask themselves as they read

**First, I ask myself:** *What was that section of text about? What is happening in this section?*

**Then I ask myself:**

1. If I am not sure what this section is about, I ask: *Are there any words I cannot read or do not understand? Are there any phrases or sentences that do not make sense? Should I reread that section carefully?*
2. If a word or phrase doesn't make sense, I ask: *How am I going to figure out what that word or phrase means?*
3. If I am not sure what this section is about but it reminds me of something, I ask: *What else do I know about this topic?*
4. If I think I know what this section is about, I ask: *What are the main points?*

### Teacher demonstrating how to ask questions to monitor comprehension

Teacher and students are reading a biography of Mary Winston Jackson.

**Teacher:** *To keep track of what I am reading, I am going to ask myself questions. After this first paragraph, I ask, "What was this section of text about?" I read that Mary Winston Jackson loved science and that she volunteered by helping youngsters in a science club at a local community center. They built wind tunnels and conducted experiments. I think I understand this part of the passage.*

The teacher goes on to read more and realizes that the students might struggle with the next paragraph, so models how to figure out what the section of text is about.

**Teacher:** *I am going to ask myself, "What was this section of text about?" I know it is about a woman, a scientist. But I can't figure out what she did. I am not sure. I realize now that I do not understand this section. I ask myself, "Do I need to reread this section? Should I reread the section slowly?" Yeah, I need to reread this section slowly. Maybe that will help me.*

The teacher rereads the sentences aloud slowly.

**Teacher:** *Oh...I see, here the text talks about how she helped young people.*

The teacher goes on to explain that students can monitor for understanding as they read by asking themselves questions. If they do not understand something, they can reread the text or seek more information from a peer, teacher, or online resource.

### 3. Provide opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned.

#### Instructional strategies from the examples

- Ask students to write down what they learned from the reading, what they are confused about, and what steps they might take to help them understand better.
- Use sentence starters to support students.
- Use comprehension questions and ask students to mark any answers that they are not confident in.

#### South Carolina standards alignment

**ELA:** 3-5.1.5, 6-8.1.5, 9-12.1.5

**TEACHER:** INST.MS.3, INST.AM.5, INST.Q.8, INST.AF.5, INST.PS.1

Before the end of the intervention session, ask students to write down what they learned in the day's lesson, what they are still confused about, and what they might have done to help themselves understand better. This will help them to remember new information and think about what could help them in the future.

Sentence starters can help students write about what they learned. Have students choose 2–3 sentence starters to complete at the end of class.

Alternatively, ask students to answer some comprehension questions instead. Ask students to mark any answers in which they are not confident. This will help students practice identifying when they do not understand what they read.

#### Possible sentence starters to complete after reading

1. Today I learned...
2. I was surprised by...
3. The most useful thing I will take from this lesson is...
4. One thing I am not sure about is...
5. The main thing I want to find out more about is...
6. After this session, I feel...

## Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>My students are reticent to share what they did not understand.</i>	Helping students feel comfortable sharing when they are not understanding what they are reading may take time. Some students may not feel comfortable at first. They may want to hide their confusion, or they may not be accustomed to identifying when they are stuck. Repeatedly and gently, encourage students to share when they need help and remind them that you are there to help.
<i>I keep stopping every two minutes to make sure they are understanding what they read. This does not seem to be working well.</i>	It can be hard to follow along with the text if you are stopping too often. If this technique is not working well, interrupt their reading after longer sections of text. Ask students to continue to mark (e.g., underline or highlight) any problem areas in the text as they read and share what they marked at stop points further along in the text.
<i>Students like to preview the text to determine how difficult it is, but this doesn't seem like a good use of their time.</i>	Previewing text can prepare students for reading and can help them monitor their understanding. Students can check the title, subheadings, and figures to get a sense of what they will be reading and to quickly check in with themselves to see if the passage's topic is something they know about or if it is a topic that is unfamiliar to them. Teach students to think about whether the text will be difficult for them and how much they will read before checking their understanding.
<i>My students mark too many words that they cannot read. How do I help them?</i>	If students underline profusely, check the difficulty level of the text. It could be that the text the students are reading is not at an appropriate level. If the text is at the students' instructional level, ask students to pick a few words or phrases that made it hard for them to understand the passage and focus on those. Consider modeling for students how you got stuck and choose a few words or phrases to mark for further exploration or discussion. If this remains a chronic problem, reconsider the reading material being used. It may be too difficult.

*Reference:* Vaughn, S., Gersten, R., Dimino, J., Taylor, M. J., Newman-Gonchar, R., Krowka, S., Kieffer, M. J., McKeown, M., Reed, D., Sanchez, M., St. Martin, K., Wexler, J., Morgan, S., Yañez, A., & Jayanthi, M. (2022). *Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9* (WWC 2022007). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://whatworks.ed.gov/>.