

Reading comprehension strategies¹

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¹ With thanks to the City of Dublin VEC Psychological Service for material

Ways of reading

There are many different ways of reading a text:

Predicting	You make informed guesses about the text
Skimming	You read quickly through the sentences getting a gist of the understanding of the text
Scanning	Your eyes dart around a text searching for a specific word/phrase/number
Close reading	You pay close attention to the sentences, taking time to understand the meaning
Questioning	You ask questions about a text to clarify your ideas
Reading backwards and forwards	When you have to read back in a text or read forward in order to make connections or clarify your ideas
Empathising	When you put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel what they feel
Visualising	You see a picture in your mind to help gain a better impression or understanding of the text
Inferring	When someone makes a point that isn't obvious and you have to read 'between the lines' to find the meaning

When was the last time you used one of these reading strategies to understand more about a text?

An active reading strategy

SQ3R is an active reading strategy. It stands for **Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review**.

Survey.

Before you begin to read a chapter survey it first. This means that you get the gist of it by reading the introduction headings, graphs, tables etc. the summary section, if there is one, and any questions at the end of that chapter. This will focus the mind on what to expect when reading the chapter in full.

Question.

After you survey the chapter think up questions that you think the chapter will answer. The headings in the chapter will help you formulate the questions as well as the questions at the end of the chapter and previous examination questions on that topic. Formulating questions before you fully read a chapter makes reading active as you are actively seeking answers while reading, rather than passively reading. Passive reading often results in not knowing what the paragraph is about after you have just read it!

Read.

Read the chapter and note down any possible answers to the questions you formulated. Note also any key phrases as you read. Pick up any threads in the chapter (e.g. firstly, secondly.....and finally). Make a list of the points if this format is used. If you do not understand a passage after re-reading it, ask for help. If you understand you will remember more efficiently.

Recall.

After reading the chapter check if you have answered any of the questions you formulated. Check if you can remember any of the main points. Reread any section you have little information on or those sections that you cannot remember. Use your own words instead of learning the chapter off by heart!

Review.

Go over (review) your notes at the end of that study session. A study session ought to last about 40-45 minutes followed by a break. Try to make links between what you have just learned to previously learned information.

<h2>SQ3R: A Strategy For Active Reading</h2>
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SQ3R provides a systematic approach to help improve reading comprehension.

How SQ3R works

S Survey

Look over the whole assignment before you actually start to read it.

1. Check the title.
2. Note the beginning and end to get a notion of how much there is.
3. Pay attention to headings and subheadings.
4. Look at charts, pictures, graphs. Check the captions under each.
5. Quickly read any headnotes, introductory paragraphs and summary sections.

Q Question

Jot down the questions that you personally want answered. Sometimes, turning the headings and subheadings into questions helps.

R Read

1. Read the introductory paragraphs rather carefully.
2. Add to your personal list of questions.
3. Skim the less important points.
4. Add difficult words to your question sheet.
5. Keep asking yourself: What is the main purpose?

R Review

Try to remember each section. What was the main purpose?
What were the chief points? What was the over-all plan?

R Recite

“Tell” your answers to the questions, either to yourself in writing or to another student in conversation. Make a summary which includes the answers to your questions.

Using SQR3 Active Reading for Information

In order to study by reading, students need:

1. To have a general plan.
2. To ask questions.
3. To read actively to discover the answers.
4. To react to what they read
5. To remind themselves of what they have learned.

One of the most effective approaches to study reading is the SQ3R method.

The steps are:

1. Survey the headings and summarize quickly.
2. Turn the first heading into a question.
3. Read the whole section through to answer that question.
4. At the end of the section stop. Recite from memory the answer to the question. Jot the answer down in phrases.
5. At the end of reading review the lesson to organise the ideas and recite various points to fix them in the mind.

Steps 2, 3 and 4 are repeated on each succeeding headed section.

Ways to exploit reading texts

The web is a great source of textual information, but if you are like us, you won't have the time or inclination to spend hours turning pages from the web into complete lesson plans with worksheets, handouts etc. So here are our top ten ideas for taking ANY text and using it in class with the least amount of preparation time on your part. Enjoy!

1. Expand the text

With short, simple texts, get students to add an adjective in front of every noun/an adverb to every verb etc.

For slightly longer texts – before class write (10) extra clauses or sentences that can be inserted into the text. Write these up in jumbled order on the board and get students to add them in the most appropriate places.

2. Reduce the text

Get students to reduce the text to EXACTLY (100) words OR reduce the total number of sentences by (50%).

3. Reconstruct the text

Before class, write a list of key words from the text in jumbled order on a sheet of paper. Make one copy for each group of students.

In class, give out the text to all the students. Get them to read it through. Now ask them to turn over the text. Hand out the jumbled keywords. Ask students to put the keywords back into the correct order WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE TEXT. When they get stuck, allow them to reread to the text (but first get them to cover up the jumbled words again.)

When all the students have got the words in the correct order, take the text away. Get students to reconstruct the text (orally or in writing) from the key words.

4. Matching

Before class, get a heavy black pen and cross out the first sentence of each paragraph. (If you downloaded the page off the web, use your word processor to delete the sentences before printing.)

In class, write the missing sentences up in jumbled order on the board and get students to add them back into the text in the correct place.

Note: choosing the first sentence of paragraph is particularly useful as these often summarise the main idea of the paragraph. Students can use these sentences to help them understand and structure the text.

5. Transform the text

Students must transform the text in some way, for example:

- Retell a story in the first person not the third person
- Retell a story from the perspective of a different character in the story (e.g. from the wolf's perspective, not from Little Red Riding Hood's.)

- Present a news story as a TV news item instead of a newspaper item.

6. Deduction

Copy the text onto a piece of A4 paper. Tear off a column (say 4cm wide) down the left hand side of the copy and a similar sized column off the right hand side.

Photocopy and hand out the remaining “middle” part of the story. Students must work together to deduce the whole story from the bits they have. Hand out the original story for comparison at the end.

7. Text quiz

Hand out the chosen text to the class. Give them time to read it, check new words etc.

Now get the students in groups to prepare (15) questions about the text which another group will have to answer from memory. Questions should be factual.

When the groups are ready, cover up all copies of the text, then get groups to swap their question sheets and answer each other’s questions. The group that answers the most questions correctly wins.

8. Word partnership

Before class, find (15) useful word partnership in your chosen text. Write the first word of each partnership down the left-hand side of a piece of paper.

E.g. ‘Solve’ goes with what other word in the text?

(“The **puzzle**, which had baffled experts for well over 20 years, was finally **solved** by a 12years-old girls from Ramsgate.”)

Don’t forget that word partnership can consist of two or three words, and also that sometimes a word is partnered with one in a completely different part of the text.

In class, hand out the text. Allow students time to read and ask questions.

Now get the students to complete the sheet that you prepared by finding the partners for each word.

As a follow up, students can test each other by covering up one of the columns on their sheets and trying to remember the missing word partners.

9. Reactions

Before class, prepare a list of sentences along the following lines:

What I found most	interesting	about this text was
	boring	
	shocking	
	amusing	
	irritating	
	baffling	
	incredible	
	etc.	

In class, allow students time to read the text and check out any problems. Then ask them to complete all / some of the sentences from your list.

When they have finished, put them in groups to discuss their reactions.

10. Talk about the text

One of the things we often do in real life is tell someone else about a story / news item / magazine article etc that we read.

To do this in class, all you need is a text and a group of students. Get the students to read the text. Now ask them to describe the text and their reactions to it to their partner. Get them to start like this:

'I was reading this (story) the other day and it was really interesting. What it said was ...'

Variation: have two or more texts and get different students to read and talk about different texts.

Acknowledgements:

These strategies come from Churchill House School of English Language in Kent, England. See their website <http://www.churchillhouse.com/index.html> for more language and literacy activities

You will find great ideas on ways of dealing with short texts in Alan Maley's classic book "Short & Sweet", publ. Penguin

For lots of good ideas on exploiting the language – especially the lexis – of authentic texts, Mark Powell's seminal "Business Matters" comes with a whole raft of resource ideas in the teacher's book. Publ. LTP