

9

Reading Comprehension

TOD Tests Assessing Reading Comprehension

TOD-S Test 3Sb: Question Reading Fluency

TOD-C Test 16C: Silent Reading Efficiency

Related Section

Section 8: Vocabulary

Introduction

A clear link exists between the basic reading limitations that are caused by dyslexia and the secondary problems that individuals experience with reading comprehension. Although dyslexia is not primarily a reading comprehension problem, individuals who exhibit the hallmark characteristics of dyslexia (e.g., word reading difficulties, a slow reading rate, poor spelling) often struggle with reading comprehension as a consequence of their poor word reading skill and slow reading rate (Awada & Plana, 2018; International Dyslexia Association, 2002; Proctor et al., 2017). All too often, these readers avoid reading, may make errors reading or hearing words, and generally experience difficulty when engaging in basic literacy-building activities. In addition, some students with dyslexia have language impairments that affect both their listening and reading comprehension.

The ultimate goal of reading is *comprehension*, typically defined as making meaning from text. One of the most elemental and important early skills acquired by good readers is the ability to monitor their understanding as they read. Good readers recognize when they do not understand the text and employ strategies to correct problems in their understanding. Good readers use other strategies as well and tend to have strong metacognitive abilities, which are defined as self-monitoring or “thinking about thinking.” Readers who have difficulty decoding words or reading at an appropriate rate often fail to grasp the meanings of words and text (Proctor et al., 2017). Such readers may not understand how to use effective corrective strategies. For example, they may attempt to reread a section or use the context to figure out a word they do not know. Often these types of strategies are ineffective, in part because these

readers have not fully mastered sound–symbol relationships. They may not recognize the importance of topic sentences, have difficulty adjusting their reading speed, have trouble relating new information to old, are unable to distinguish between important

and unimportant content, and cannot pose good questions to guide their attention. However, many individuals with dyslexia do develop compensatory strategies to aid in reading comprehension as they grow older (Moojen et al., 2020; Reis et al., 2020).

Selecting Recommendations

Students with dyslexia have weaknesses in word reading and/or reading rate; as a result, they often benefit from instruction in how to implement comprehension monitoring strategies (Awada & Plana, 2018; Otaiba et al., 2018). Teaching readers to become better at comprehending text requires attention to multiple strategies. Some are more applicable for certain ages than for other ages (Gelbar et al., 2018). For example, teachers of younger students often use basic activities to help their students master comprehension building blocks (e.g., identifying main ideas from simple text, as shown in K5 Learning [2021]).

Before selecting recommendations, attempt to determine the reasons that a student is struggling with comprehension (e.g., poor decoding, slow reading,

limited vocabulary). The recommendations here provide examples of various techniques for building comprehension skills and can be applied to any type of content. For students in middle school and above, several recommendations describe various comprehension methods that contain multiple steps. Many are referenced by titles using mnemonics to help students remember the various steps. These multi-step strategies are especially helpful for improving comprehension of longer texts that are content specific (e.g., history, science, geography, psychology). Remember to teach reading comprehension strategies using a research-validated model of strategy acquisition (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992).

Recommendations

Instructional Level

If the student is experiencing difficulty understanding the content of a text, the first step is to determine the appropriate instructional level. Have the student read the first 100 words of the text to ensure they have the prerequisite basic reading skills needed to understand the text. Use the five-finger rule to

determine if the student has reading accuracy/word recognition skills with 95% accuracy. Count on one hand any errors. If the student misses more than five or six words, the text is likely to be too difficult. For independent reading, select texts that the student can read with 95% accuracy.

Explicit Instruction and Practice

When teaching a new strategy, provide explicit instruction and practice. Begin by modeling and discussing the steps in the strategy. Next, provide guided practice, giving immediate corrective feedback as needed. Once the student demonstrates how

to use the strategy, allow them to practice and apply the strategy independently.

Use the following research-based guidelines for teaching reading comprehension strategies:

- Administer a pre-test to assess the current level of performance.
- Obtain a commitment from the student to learn the strategy.
- Describe the strategy—the steps, the purpose, and when to use it.
- Model the strategy steps, discussing the steps as you apply them to the material to be learned.
- Practice any mnemonic devices used orally to help memorize the steps.
- Provide a cue card if necessary.
- Provide controlled practice in materials at the student's independent reading level, gradually applying the strategy to more challenging material.
- Administer a post-test to evaluate the student's ability to apply the strategy and to note improvement and success when applying the strategy.
- Plan for and facilitate the application of the strategy into other appropriate settings.

Previewing Strategies

Explain that before beginning to read, the student should determine the purpose for reading the material. This will help the student know what to look for while reading.

Before the student reads a chapter, teach them to review the text title, headings, chapter summary, and chapter objectives (if present) to obtain a general idea of the content. Specifically, ask the student to

- look at the title
- read the first and last paragraphs
- look at the headings and subheadings
- look at the captions, pictures, and words in bold

Have the student summarize what these all have in common and identify the main focus of the chapter.

Making Predictions

Teach the student to make predictions when reading. For example, using the title of a chapter or book, ask the student to express an opinion about the purpose and content. As the student reads the selection, ask if the prediction was correct. Have the

student continue to make predictions while reading. If necessary, help them make predictions by asking questions such as “What do you think will happen next?” or “What do you think will be the result of the conflict?”

Demonstrate how to set a purpose for reading and how to make predictions before, during, and after reading a text. Guide the student in revising predictions along the way at predetermined stopping points.

Active Reading Strategies

Teach the student to be an active reader by identifying main ideas and connecting concepts while reading. The student needs to be actively engaged in understanding what they read. Help develop the student's self-monitoring/metacognitive behaviors. For example, encourage the student to ask for help when encountering unfamiliar words or have the student look the words up in a dictionary.

Encourage the student to connect new content to information they already know. Explain that activating prior knowledge is an important way to enhance learning and comprehension. For example, before the student reads a new text, identify the topic and ask the student to share any experiences or knowledge they have about the topic. Guide the student through the process by asking questions about the content to stimulate prior knowledge.

Teach the student a variety of strategies to address comprehension issues that arise. For example, suggest that they place a check mark beside any word, sentence, or idea they do not understand. For sentences or ideas they do not understand, discuss the meaning and then have them paraphrase the meaning. Afterward, check the student's comprehension by having them reread the sentence(s).

Graphic Organizers

Teach the student to use graphic organizers (e.g., semantic maps, word maps or webs) to help them understand text structure, vocabulary, and the relationship among ideas. A semantic map helps connect prior knowledge to new vocabulary and concepts. A word map or web expands word knowledge. A target word is placed in the middle of the web; then, the student writes synonyms and related ideas on lines that radiate from the target word.

Visualization

Encourage the student to improve their reading comprehension by visualizing what they are reading. Explain that this is thinking in pictures, like making a movie. Select a paragraph that uses descriptive language and is at an appropriate reading level. After the student has read the content, ask what images come to mind. You may need to model this process using a think-aloud approach that illustrates how to create the images based on the words in the text. It may also be helpful to ask the student questions about specific elements in the paragraph.

Teach the student to use pictures, graphs, or diagrams that appear in the text to enhance their understanding of the content:

1. Select an appropriate textbook chapter that includes a variety of visuals.
2. Turn to a graph, for example, and have the student tell the meaning of the content within the graph.
3. Ask the student to describe how this visual information helps clarify the content of the text.
4. Repeat this process with various graphs, pictures, and diagrams.
5. If necessary, model this process using a think-aloud procedure that shows how understanding these visuals can enhance comprehension.

Paraphrasing/Summarization

When teaching the student how to paraphrase and summarize, ensure that the materials are at their independent reading level so that the focus can be on understanding the text, rather than on word identification.

Teach the student how to distinguish the main idea of a passage from the details. Present a short newspaper article or paragraph that has a clear topic sentence and explain the supportive details. Provide longer passages and ask the student to state one common main idea across multiple paragraphs.

Many students need explicit instruction in building reading comprehension strategies. Request that the student summarize or retell each paragraph. The student can summarize certain sections of a passage, or they can summarize an entire passage when they get

to the end of the passage. If the student has trouble retelling what they read, ask prompting questions such as “What happened next?” or “What else did the passage say about _____?”

Have the student identify the details of a paragraph. Ask the student to use question words (e.g., *Who*, *What*, *Where*, *When*, *Why*, *How*) and make up questions that require detailed answers. Once the student has formulated the questions, ask them to turn the questions into statements to summarize the information in the details.

Asking and Answering Questions

Ask the student to read a segment of the text. Next, ask the student questions. When the student gives an answer, have them explain it. Then switch roles. Ask the student to generate a question about the meaning of a particular passage; you will then answer the student’s question.

Teach the “It Says, I Say, And So” strategy for answering questions. First, have the student read the question. Then, have them follow these three steps: (1) It Says: Look in the text and find information that will help answer the question. (2) I Say: Think about what you already know about the information. (3) And So: To determine the answer, combine what the text says and what you already know.

After reading a question, ask the student to determine if the answer (a) is apparent in the immediate text; (b) requires using background information from the text or the reader; or (c) requires going beyond the information that is presented in the text.

Teach the student how to ask and answer these types of questions while reading (Boyles, 2013):

- What is the author telling me here?
- Are there any hard or important words?
- What does the author want me to understand?
- How does the author play with language to add interest?

Adjusting Reading Rate

Help the student understand that reading rate needs to be adjusted to facilitate comprehension of different types of text. Use an analogy to illustrate this point. For example, a car needs to move slowly and to stop

frequently when traffic is heavy. This is analogous to reading content that is technical or unfamiliar. The rate needs to be slow, and stops are needed to make sure comprehension occurs. At other times, the car is on an open road and moves along quickly with no stops. This is like reading for pleasure. The reading is easy to comprehend, and the rate is quick. Just as the driver of a car needs to change the car's rate based on the conditions, a reader has to adjust reading rate to ensure comprehension. Use various types of text to illustrate the need to adjust reading rate.

Literary Text Structure

Teach the student the “Somebody ... Wanted ... But ... So ...” strategy to increase their understanding of literary (narrative) text structure:

- **Somebody:** Who is the main character?
- **Wanted:** What does the main character want and why?
- **But:** Why can't the main character get what they want?
- **So:** How does the main character solve the problem?

Provide guided practice until the student demonstrates they understand how to apply this strategy when reading.

Teach the student how to identify the following story elements:

- **Characters:** These are the main character and minor characters.
- **Setting:** The time and place of the story are described.
- **Initiating event:** A problem occurs.
- **Internal responses:** The characters' thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions are noted.
- **Attempt(s):** The main character's goal-related actions are described.
- **Resolution:** The problem is solved, or a new attempt is proposed.

Syntax and Grammar

Help the student increase their knowledge of syntax and grammar, both of which influence reading comprehension. Syntax (the rule system that determines

the structure of sentences) focuses on word order, and grammar refers to linguistic concepts (e.g., word forms like singular and plural, verb tense, parts of speech). A combination of knowledge of syntax and grammar along with knowledge of vocabulary provide the foundations of reading comprehension. Students who have difficulties with syntax, grammar, and vocabulary often use words in the wrong order, create sentences that don't make sense, use pronouns incorrectly, fail to use word endings (e.g., *-ed*, *-ing*, *-s*) correctly, have trouble connecting sentences or thoughts using conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*, *or*, *yet*), and fail to understand verb tenses (e.g., past, present, future). Identify the student's specific areas of difficulty and provide practice that will help them master the rules of syntax and grammar. You can find additional specific tips at [WritingPrompts.com](https://www.writingprompts.com) (2023).

Provide the student with sentence-building activities. Get some magazines, show the student pictures of everyday items, and ask the student to say a sentence that describes each object.

Provide open-ended prompts and ask the student to complete the prompts verbally or to write sentences.

Provide cartoon frames from newspaper comics and cover the speech bubbles; ask the student to tell or write what the character is saying. Ask questions about the cartoon; these questions should prompt the student to use different forms of the verb.

Write words on notecards and scramble the cards. Ask the student to pick words that make a complete sentence/question (include the punctuation mark).

Use cloze sentences to have the student practice the correct use of verb tense, adjectives, and adverbs. For example, the student might complete the following sentence by filling in a correct word: “John _____ to the store yesterday.”

Use sentence-combining exercises to help develop the student's skill in understanding and writing more complex sentence structures. To begin, write two or three simple sentences and then ask the student to combine these sentences into one longer sentence. Discuss other options. Next, take short sentences directly from the student's written work. You may also use exercises that focus on a specific aspect of grammar. For example, teach the student how to join clauses using a variety of conjunctions (e.g., *because*, *but*, *or*).

Multistep Comprehension Methods

Because students with dyslexia have weaknesses in word reading and rate, they have trouble completing and understanding both narrative and expository content, particularly lengthy reading assignments within textbooks. Select and teach the student a specific strategy to help deepen understanding of subject matter text.

Select a specific comprehension strategy and teach it to the student. Examples are K-W-L, RAP, PLUGIN, SQ3R, PQRSST, and the ART of Reading. Any of these methods should facilitate effective comprehension monitoring. Decide which one might be most appropriate for the student. While all these strategies contain similarities, SQ3R, PQRSST, and the ART of Reading provide more reader content interaction than K-W-L, RAP, and PLUGIN. For each strategy, provide specific instructions for the student. For some strategies, you will need to provide copies of the instructional steps the student will need to complete the procedure.

K-W-L

Use the K-W-L procedure to help improve the student's reading comprehension of a passage (Ogle, 1986). Create three columns and place a K at the top of the first one, a W at the top of the second one, and an L at the top of the third one. These are the steps the student follows:

1. Before reading a passage, list what you already know about the topic (K: What I Know).
2. Write questions about what you want to learn (W: What I Want to Learn).
3. Read the passage and summarize what you learned (L: What I Learned).

You can also add a fourth column and write an S at the top. Ask what additional information the student would still like to learn (S: Still Want to Learn).

RAP

Use the paraphrasing strategy to help improve the student's reading comprehension (Schumaker et al., 1984). Tell the student that the strategy uses the acronym RAP. Have the student read each step indicated by the acronym, as follows:

1. Read the paragraph (or a limited section of text).
2. Ask what the main idea and the details (at least two) were.
3. Put the information into your own words.

This strategy is designed to improve comprehension by focusing attention on the important information of a passage and by ensuring active involvement with the passage.

PLUGIN

To help improve the student's reading comprehension, use the PLUGIN strategy (Ritchey et al., 2017). Communicate these steps to the student:

1. Preview and use text features (making predictions and generating questions). Have the student preview the text, focusing on headings/subheadings, bold words, pictures, and other expository text features. Encourage the student to make predictions about what they might learn from the text and to generate questions.
2. Link. Have the student make connections between what they read and their prior knowledge.
3. Use fix-up strategies. Have the student identify words, phrases, or text they do not understand and evaluate whether the misunderstanding was about how to read the text (decoding), what the text means, or both.
4. Generate questions before and during reading.
5. In your own words (main idea). Have the student identify the topic (the "who" or the "what") and the most important information about this topic in the text. Main-idea instruction targets identifying the main ideas in pictures, sentences, and passages. Summarization instruction focuses on longer sections of text (multiple paragraphs, chapters).
6. Now, answer the questions. Have the student answer the questions by identifying whether the answer is *Here* (in the text), the answer is *Hidden* (in the text but hidden), the answer is *In My Head* (not in the text), or the reader should be *On the Hunt* for the answer (not in the text but can be answered using other resources).

SQ3R

Teach the SQ3R strategy (Robinson, 1946, 1978). Provide the overall context for using this strategy. Write “SQ3R” on the board or on a piece of paper. Say to the student: “There are five steps that will help you learn to comprehend your textbooks better. This strategy is called SQ3R. The five steps are Survey (S), Question (Q), and Read, Recite, and Review (3R).” Proceed to explain each step:

1. Survey (S): This means to survey the text you are to read. You will examine the text but will not start reading. Look at the title, headings, subheadings, or other particular features such as tables, figures, summary paragraphs, or advance organizers of any kind. This should take only a few minutes, and it will create an outline or framework for your understanding. This information should help you form ideas and questions about the content of the passage or chapter.
2. Question (Q): For this step, take 3 or 4 minutes and ask yourself questions. Based on the headings, subheadings, figures, tables, and so on, you might ask, “What is this passage or chapter about?” or “What questions are being addressed?” or “How do the title, headings, and subheadings help me understand the goal of the text?”
3. Read: In this step, you read the text and think about the questions you created. Keep them in mind as you read. Go ahead and read the next paragraph or section.
4. Recite: This step helps you read actively as you try to retrieve from memory the main ideas you are reading. Think back to the questions you asked yourself earlier and put answers to those questions *in your own words*. You will most likely answer these questions orally or silently, but you could also write the answers down. This step helps you “own” the materials as you put the main points into words you understand.
5. Review: This step asks that you identify orally or in writing the main point or points of the whole passage or chapter. Use your own words to say the main point or points of this passage or chapter.

PQRST

Provide the overall context for using PQRST strategy (Gunning, 2002). Write “PQRST” on the board or on a piece of paper. Say to the student: “There are five

steps that will help you improve your reading comprehension. This approach is called PQRST because the five steps are Preview (P), Question (Q), Read (R), Summarize (S), and Test yourself (T). With practice, this reading strategy can help you remain active and alert so you can make sense of and remember what you read and become a more efficient reader.” Explain each step to the student. Say:

1. Preview (P): This first step takes 5–10 minutes. Preview the content before reading it. Previewing text helps you get a sense of what you will be learning before you start to read. For example, read the title and review the chapter objectives or goals, if these are available. You might ask yourself a few questions, such as, “What do I already know about this topic?” or “What do I think I will learn?” Look at the introduction for hints about main ideas. Read and think about the headings, subheadings, tables, and figures. Review any pictures and diagrams, charts, bolded or italicized words, and marginal notes. If review questions or a summary are included at the end of the chapter, read them.
2. Question (Q): For the second step, you will ask questions (1–2 minutes per heading) to help focus your reading and to find the key points in each section. You will read the headings; create questions based on the headings; and then ask yourself the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. You may write the answers to your questions in the margins or on sticky notes.
3. Read (R): In the third step, you will read only the section of text that applies to the heading with which you are working. Often each paragraph introduces one key idea, and this idea is often found in the first sentence. While reading, look for the answers to your questions. Reread sentences or sections until you find the answers. To help, you might locate and underline or highlight important concepts in the text.
4. Summarize (S): In the fourth step, after each paragraph or section, summarize the meaning in your own words. Try to relate the new information you have learned to something you already know and consider writing down any helpful ideas in your notes. Next, summarize answers in your own words for the next section of the text. Repeat this process until you reach the end of the chapter. Try to capture all the key ideas in your summary.

5. Test yourself (T): For the last step, recall or reread the questions you wrote and try to answer them aloud or in writing.

The ART of Reading

Teach the ART of Reading strategy (McCallum & Bell, 2010). Write “ART” on the board or on a piece of paper. Say: “There are three steps that will help you learn to comprehend text content better. This approach is called the ART of Reading. The three steps are Ask, Read, and Tell. Using these three steps will help you develop a deeper understanding of the words and content you read. The following Student Guide will help you master the three steps. Although the steps are straightforward, we will go over them together first.”

You may copy the Student Guide and share it. First, share the introductory material. Begin by explaining the fundamental goal of reading in the “Why Do We Read?” section. Then, explain the “How Do We Read?” section and each of the three major steps (Ask, Read, and Tell). Then ask the student to read Steps 1, 2, and 3 as described later. Provide help reading the steps if necessary. The last step requires the student to identify and paraphrase the main ideas.

Why Do We Read?

The goal of reading is to learn. Reading is thinking with words. Successful readers understand and remember information they read.

How Do We Read?

Many students think reading can be done in one step. However, it is helpful to view reading as having three steps. The first step is to *ask yourself questions* about the content based on previewing it. The second is to actually *read the selection with understanding*. The third is to *tell what you have learned*, either to yourself or someone else. Provide paper and say: “You will want to make a few quick notes as you read. You do not have to write in complete sentences or questions.”

Step 1: Ask

Ask questions about the reading selection. Do the following (place a check mark on the line at the end of each bullet that you actually completed):

- Read the chapter or selection title and ask yourself, “What does this cover?” _____
- Ask yourself, “What is the main topic of the reading selection?” _____
- Ask yourself, “How familiar is this material? What do I already know about it?” _____
- If there are questions in the selection, ask them to yourself in your own words. _____
- If there are no questions, look at the headings and make a few questions of your own. _____

Step 2: Read

After each paragraph, STOP and ask yourself, “Does this passage make sense?” If what you are reading does not make sense, slow your reading and focus on the meaning. Do the following (place a check mark on the line at the end of each bullet that you actually completed):

- At the end of each paragraph, ask yourself, “What does this mean?” and “Does this make sense?” _____
- If you come to a word you do not know, write it in the margin of the text or on a sticky note. If you can’t figure out the meaning, stop and look it up. _____
- Focus your attention. In order to understand what you read, you must maintain your focus. _____

Step 3: Tell

After every paragraph or section, tell yourself or someone else what you have read, in your own words. Do the following (place a check mark on the line at the end of each bullet that you actually completed):

- In your book put a check mark after each paragraph that you understood. Put a “–” sign if you did not understand it. You can keep track of this on a sticky note if you prefer. _____
- As you read, answer the questions you asked. Write a few key words to jog your memory later. _____
- Then ask yourself, “What is the main topic?” Then summarize the topic in your own words. _____

Group Approaches to Comprehension Instruction

Reciprocal Teaching

Have the student participate in Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) to help the student improve reading comprehension. This cooperative learning strategy involves four main strategies:

- questioning (formulating and answering questions about the content)
- predicting (saying what will come next)
- clarifying (recognizing and correcting breakdowns in comprehension)
- summarizing (identifying and paraphrasing main ideas)

There are four students in the group, and each student is assigned one of the following roles:

- The questioner helps the other group members ask and answer questions about the text (e.g., What questions did you have as you read? Can anyone help answer that question?).
- The predictor helps the other group members connect sections of the text by reviewing predictions from the previous section and by identifying clues about what students will read in the next section (e.g., What did we predict last time about what we read? Were our predictions correct? What do you think will happen next?).
- The clarifier helps the other group members find parts of the reading that are not clear and asks the group to help find ways to clear up these difficulties (e.g., Which parts of this were confusing or unclear? Can anyone help us clarify that part?).
- The summarizer helps the other group members restate the main ideas in the reading (e.g., What are the main ideas in this part? Can you use your own words to state the main idea in one sentence?).

Collaborative Strategic Reading

The student will likely benefit from daily practice with the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) strategy (Klingner & Vaughn, 1998). The CSR strategy is somewhat unique in that it provides comprehension instruction from a teacher, yet it allows students to learn from each other during collaborative group work. Within this strategy, the teacher helps students preview their level of comprehension and then teaches and models how to work in groups to address their comprehension limitations. Initially, the teacher orients the students toward the reading goals within the context of the current lesson and helps them engage in the initial steps by previewing the content with them. The implementation of this model requires four steps:

1. Preview (engage with the content, brainstorm current knowledge, and use a journal to record the purpose of the content).
2. Use the “Click and Clunk” strategy. While reading, students monitor understanding—after reading a sentence or section of text, they stop and identify “clicks” and “clunks.” “Clicks” are important words they know or can figure out from context. “Clunks” are words or ideas that are unknown; students write these in their journal, work with their group to figure out the meaning of the unknown words, and record the strategy used. Finally, students put the definition back in the sentence to be sure it makes sense.
3. Students work to “Get the Gist” by focusing on the relevant questions such as content details including who, what, and when.
4. Students wrap up by integrating the new knowledge with existing knowledge and by reviewing meaningfulness.

Boardman (2017) is available as a resource and includes more detail about implementation of this strategy. In addition, an online module (Vanderbilt University, 2022) provides specific instruction in this strategy under the modules in Reading, Literacy, and Language Arts.

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