

What Do Students Need to Understand Their Textbooks?

Students must have the following competencies in order to assure comprehension of their reading materials:

■ *Linguistic Competence*

Basic language abilities must be present; that is, readers must have the ability to effectively use *graphophonemic*, *syntactic*, and *semantic* “cues.” These abilities may be limited in students who are troubled readers or who have second language issues.

■ *Word Knowledge*

Extensive vocabularies are crucial. In specialized fields, the “jargon” of the field must be understood. Vocabulary development in the content areas must be part of the curriculum.

■ *Prior Knowledge*

Readers must have some background information from which to draw upon when transacting with a text. This is generally referred to as *schema*.

■ *Knowledge of Text Structure*

Readers must understand the structure of the text they are reading. For fiction, readers recognize that most stories have a beginning, middle, and end. For non-fiction, readers must rely on text features (titles, subheadings, bold and italicized print, organizers) to help them have a “transaction,” or meaningful experience, with the text.

■ *Ability to Make Relationships*

Readers must be able to relate new information to old information and to organize it categorically, or establish it in a hierarchical structure.

■ *Ability to Summarize*

Readers must be able to “reconstruct” the major elements or events of a text. They may *retell* the events, *relate* major facts and concepts, or they may answer questions reflecting different *QAR* types.

■ *Ability to Conclude, Infer, Generalize, Hypothesize, Offer Opinions*

Readers must be able to use the information they have encountered in text.

Adapted from:

Devine, T. G. (1986). *Teaching reading comprehension: From theory to practice*.
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