

TEN KEY READING COMPEHENSION STRATEGIES

BRISBANE CENTRAL STATE SCHOOL

At Brisbane Central we have ten focus comprehension strategies that we teach the students from Prep to Year 6 to use so that they can deeply engage with and understand texts. The selection of strategies is based on the Australian Curriculum in addition to research on what proficient readers do when reading that make them successful at comprehending the variety of texts they read.



Activate prior knowledge

When readers use what they already know to help them understand something that they are reading, they are activating their prior knowledge. Good readers think about what they know about the topic and the type of text to help them:

- predict what is coming up in the text
- make connections between what they already know (from experiences, understandings and other texts) and what is in the text, testing misunderstandings and deepening understandings
- synthesise, put the pieces together in a new way

Activating prior knowledge is a key strategy to engaging deeply with a text.

Our students, from Prep to Year 6 learn how to apply this strategy while reading.

As teachers we look for evidence that the student can:

- think about what he or she already knows about a topic or text type before reading
- use what he or she already knows to help think about what might be coming next
- make links between what he or she already knows and the ideas in the text
- check (monitoring) prior knowledge against what is in the text and confirm and revise

Activating prior knowledge is one of the focus strategies that the children learn so that can apply it when they are reading independently and gain a deeper understanding of texts.



Build and use vocabulary knowledge

When readers use what they already know to help them understand new words or phrases in the text then they are building and using their vocabulary knowledge. An understanding of vocabulary is a powerful key to understanding the text but when we do not have an understanding of the words and phrases being used, we need a strategy for unlocking the meaning from the words on the page. The children are taught to:

- re-read the section at a slower rate
- talk / think about the words they already know to understand a new word or phrase
- use knowledge of word meanings
- check understanding of the 'new' word in the context of what the author is saying

This is key to gaining the intended meaning from the author. At BCSS the children are taught to apply this strategy so that when they are reading independently they can gain more precise and richer understandings of the text.

Infer



Good readers think about and search the text, and sometimes use personal knowledge to construct meaning beyond what is literally stated. We talk to the students about the meaning being partly in the book (right there) and partly in the reader's head (author and me) but always matching with the clues in the text.

Readers can infer from images, words and phrases right there in the text and from parts of the text in different sentences, paragraphs or chapters.

As teachers we look for evidence that the student can:

- identify what is literal in the text (right there) and what is inferential (author & me)
- search the text - Reading different sentences, paragraphs, chapters and texts to find the answer
- put together what the author is telling me and what I already know
- go beyond what the authors says but keep to what the author would agree with
- explain how he/she made the inference

The assumptions, interpretations, predictions and conclusions reached are not facts that are explicitly stated but are part of the intended meaning of the text. As readers we need to be able to comprehend at an inferential level to gain the intended meaning.

Do I think this information is accurate/ correct and how do I know?

Is this plausible?

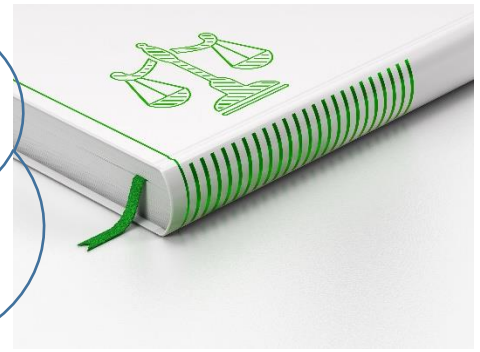
What do I like about ... and why?

What do I think about ... ideas/ character/ actions?

What do I think is effective / ineffective and why?

What do you think is fair and why?

What bias do you hear in the text?



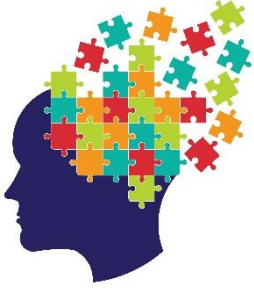
Evaluate

When readers make judgements about what they are reading and explain how and why they came to that opinion or conclusion they are demonstrating the reading comprehension strategy of evaluating. Whether it is deciding that you don't like a character because of their actions or figuring that the information you are reading on the internet is inaccurate because the source is unreliable, you are coming to a decision about the text based on criteria. Students from Years Prep to 6 are taught how to evaluate texts for different purposes. It is an essential skill for reading and teaches students to think critically about what they read.

As teachers we look for evidence that the children can:

- make judgements about what is read
- make decisions based on criteria
- explain and justify opinions about an idea, character or event
- defend opinions with evidence from the text
- state opinions
- explain opinions

Using the strategy of evaluating the students judge, justify, and/or defend their understandings by applying criteria such as importance, accuracy, credibility, usefulness, appropriateness, and personal enjoyment to the texts they are reading. Evaluating is a critical thinking skill and is important to reading and learning across the curriculum.



Make Connections

When readers make links between what is read in a text and their own experiences, what they know about the world or what they read in other texts they are making connections. This is a powerful strategy for engaging with the meaning in the text and fitting the knowledge and understandings into our existing personal knowledge and experiences. At Brisbane Central the children learn to connect ideas in a text with what they know from their own experiences/ their knowledge of the topic/ what they have gained from other texts and this helps them understand what they read and to clarify and enhance what they already know.

As teachers we look for evidence that the children can:

- think about what I already know about a topic or text type before reading
- use what I already know to help think about what might be coming next
- make links between what I already know and the ideas in the text
- monitor their prior knowledge against what is in the text and confirm or revise

Making Connections is something that good readers do automatically. As one of our focus strategies, it is explicitly taught so that the children can apply it when they are reading independently and gain that deeper understanding of the text.



Predict

When you are reading do you think about what is coming next in the story? When you open a letter do you expect to find a particular layout and certain information? If you do these things you are predicting. Good readers predict before and during reading and are more engaged and gain a better understanding.

Good readers think about what they know about the topic and what they have read so far in the words and images to help think about what is coming up in the text. They also change their predictions as they find out more. Our students, from Prep to Year 6 learn how to apply the strategy of predicting to their reading with increasing sophistication and with increasingly more complex texts.

As teachers we look for evidence that the student can:

- predict before reading based on the type of text
- use what he/she already knows to help think about what might be coming next
- use what is in the text so far to help think about what might be coming up next
- check his/her predictions against what is in the text (confirm and revise)
- make new predictions based on what he/she has read

Predicting is one of the focus strategies that the children learn so that can apply it when they are reading independently and gain a deeper understanding of the text.

Question



When readers ask questions about the text and the author's intentions and seek information to clarify and extend their thinking they are using the reading comprehension strategy of questioning. Asking and answering their own questions as they read helps the text come alive. The reader can feel like they are in a conversation with the author as they wonder why a character did something and then it is revealed in the text, as they question some information they thought they knew but is changed by new information in the text, as some new ideas they have read makes them want to know more. The students are learning to think critically about what they have read, to discuss, reflect inquire and reason.

As teachers we look for evidence that the children can:

- Ask questions for a real purpose for self as a reader (clarifying and extending own thinking)
- Ask questions that come from wanting to understand more about the text
- Ask questions about the author's intent
- Ask questions to wonder about and question yourself about ideas, characters or events
- Ask a range of different question types and about different aspects of the text

Through asking questions of themselves before, during and after reading the readers gain a deeper understanding of the ideas, actions, events and information in a text and learn to think critically about what they have read.



Summarise

Summarising can be thought of as a written task given to students to prove that they have read and understood something. When we think of summarising in the context of teaching students to read, we are referring to a thinking or cognitive strategy that readers engage in during and just after reading. It is what active readers do to make sense of the text. Readers discern what is important as they read and, as a result, gain a clearer understanding of the text. To demonstrate their use of this strategy we ask the students to share orally what they found was important in the section of text and say it in their own words. As independent readers they summarise in their head during and after reading as they think about the meaning. The children learn strategies so that they can summarise different types of texts, including informative and imaginary texts.

What good readers do:

Ask themselves what the main message is that the author wants them to get from each part of the text.

Put the main idea into their own words.

Build up an understanding of the important messages in the whole text.

Summarising requires active thinking by the students as they read, identifying the main points and ideas the author is making. It is an important skill as a reader and is an important skill for learning across the curriculum.



Synthesise

When reader's use the reading comprehension strategy of synthesising they put ideas together to see them in a new way. Readers create original insights, perspectives and understandings by reflecting on text(s) and merging elements from text and existing schema. If a reader has seen bats roosting in trees and then reads a text that states that bats live in caves, the reader can form a new understanding that there are different types of bats that roost in caves or trees. The reader has put together ideas in the text with ideas from their own prior knowledge and formed a new understanding. Readers can put together ideas from different parts of the same text, from more than one text or from texts and their own knowledge.

As teachers we look for evidence that the children can:

- Put together prior knowledge with ideas in the text
- Come up with new ideas or new ways of looking it (insight, perspective, understanding)
- Put ideas in own words
- Put pieces together from different parts of the text or from different texts

Synthesising is a higher order thinking skill and when applied to reading helps the reader engage deeply with the meaning in the text.



Visualise

Visualising is a focus comprehension strategy that the children learn to use. When readers *visualise* they create images in their minds while they are reading that reflect or represent the ideas in the text. These images may include any of the five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching) and help to enhance understanding of the text. Visualisation is a mental strategy but when the students are learning to use it we ask them to talk about or draw the images they created in their heads.

We look for evidence that the students can:

- talk about details in their descriptions of characters, setting and events (narrative) and ideas (non-fiction)
- use any of the five senses that suit
- match what the author would agree with











Visualising is one of the focus strategies that the children learn at school and can use when reading independently.

Multi-strategy instruction for developing proficient readers

At Brisbane Central we explicitly teach ten focus comprehension strategies to the students from Prep to Year 6. This selection of strategies is based on the Australian Curriculum and research on what proficient readers do that makes them successful at reading.

At BCSS our goal is for our students to use the comprehension strategies in a flexible and integrated way to deepen their understanding and enjoyment of texts. In all classrooms, students learn the strategies in isolation to help them gain clarity and become proficient users. They are also taught how to combine and integrate the strategies when reading texts.

Reading comprehension strategies
What good readers do - Active and purposeful readers use a range of comprehension strategies selectively and in combination to gain literal and inferred meaning from a wide range of texts and to summarise, evaluate and synthesise what they have read.

 Building & using vocabulary knowledge	 Activating prior knowledge	 Predicting	 Visualising
 Inferring	 Summarising	 Synthesising	 Making connections
	 Questioning	 Evaluating	

As an example, the students learn how to apply the strategy of prediction. They learn to think about what they know about the topic and what they have read so far to help think about what is coming up in the text. When they are using the strategy of prediction they may also using their strategies of:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Questioning
- Making connections
- Inferring

As teachers we look for evidence that the student can:

- Talk about his/her understanding of the text
- Talk about what strategies he/she used together
- Choose strategies that work together
- Talk about the clues he/she used from the text

Using the strategies selectively and in combination gives the students the tools to unpack the meaning in texts and deeply engage with texts.