

Reading Strategies

You can become a stronger reader with better comprehension and understanding by following a few tips and developing the habits of a good reader. Some of these strategies include previewing, using knowledge you already have, and developing reading comprehension skills.

Previewing

Previewing your reading material is the process of looking over the text and getting a grasp of the general content before reading in detail. The steps of previewing are easy to follow when you get in the habit doing them. They are as follows:

1. Look at the title and subtitles, if there are any. The title might give an idea of the overall topic of the text, and subtitles will let you know the specific focus of different sections.
2. Take a look at where the text comes from. Maybe the author is a professor or a scientist; clues like that can help you prepare for the material. Also, look at where the text comes from; it could be a political magazine, a scientific journal, or a textbook, etc.
3. Read through the introduction, usually the first paragraph. The main ideas of the text are usually found there.
4. Read through the subheadings, which will tell you the main idea of each section. If there are no subheadings, read the topic sentences of each paragraph, usually the first sentence of a paragraph.
5. Look for typographical aids like *italic letters*, **boldfaced words**, bulleted or numbered lists, or quotes set apart from the main text. These types of things often highlight important ideas.
6. Notice any graphic aids like pictures, charts or tables. These often supplement important information in the text.
7. Read the conclusion, usually the last paragraph, because it often outlines the key points of the entire text.
8. Look at the end material like references, bibliographies, study questions, and vocabulary lists. These things can give clues to the content of the text.

Using Knowledge You Already Have

Sometimes you know more than you think you do! Follow the steps below to find out.

1. Ask yourself questions about the material; you may already know some of the answers!
2. Connect the material with your own experience: you might be able to think about it in terms you're already familiar with.
3. Brainstorm – let the material remind you of things you have experienced or already know.

Developing Reading Comprehension Skills

The habits of a good reader lead to a greater understanding of written material. Some of these habits are listed below.

1. Try to read in a quiet place while you are well-rested.
2. Rephrase difficult passages in your own words.
3. Slow down and read hard-to-understand sentences out loud.
4. Reread passages you don't understand very well.
5. Write an outline of major points or highlight key terms and ideas.
6. Jot down notes in the margins.
7. Make sure you understand what an author means; use a dictionary or another text to familiarize yourself with new words.

Adapted from McWhorter, Kathleen T. Reading Across the Disciplines. 2nd Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.