

## Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies.

*Good readers use many forms of thinking and analyzing text as they read. It is therefore important to teach beginning readers strategies for constructing meaning from text.<sup>13</sup> A strategy is the intentional application of a cognitive routine by a reader before, during, or after reading a text (see box on page 11). Comprehension strategies help readers enhance their understanding, overcome difficulties in comprehending text, and compensate for weak or imperfect knowledge related to the text. The strategies may be taught one by one or in combination. Both approaches can improve reading comprehension, so the panel recommends that teachers choose the approach they are most comfortable with in the classroom.*

*Teachers should also help students learn how to use comprehension strategies independently through the gradual release of responsibility.<sup>14</sup> When releasing responsibility to students, however, be mindful that students differ in the extent of modeling or support they need from teachers in order to use strategies effectively.*

### Summary of evidence: Strong Evidence

The panel identified 10 studies that demonstrated that teaching reading comprehension strategies to primary grade students has positive effects on comprehension when measured by standardized tests and researcher-created measures.<sup>15</sup> The specific strategies discussed in this recommendation can improve comprehension when taught individually or in combination with other effective comprehension strategies.

The findings from the 10 studies are summarized below by strategy. See Appendix D for more details on these and other studies that the panel used to develop the recommendation.

- **Activating prior knowledge or predicting** was found to impact reading

## ( 10 ) Recommendation 1 *continued*

- comprehension positively in five studies.<sup>16</sup> Even so, only one study evaluated how teaching this strategy alone—relative to not teaching any strategy—affected reading comprehension.<sup>17</sup> The other four studies tested the effectiveness of teaching students to activate prior knowledge or predict in combination with other practices or other comprehension strategies.
- **Questioning** was not examined individually by any of the studies, but four studies reported positive effects on reading comprehension when it was taught along with other strategies.<sup>18</sup>
- **Visualization**, examined by two studies, was found to result in large and statistically significant gains in comprehension. One study tested the effectiveness of visualization alone,<sup>19</sup> whereas the other tested it as part of a package of multiple strategies.<sup>20</sup>
- **Monitoring, clarifying, or fix-up** strategies were evaluated in three studies as part of a package of multiple strategies.<sup>21</sup> Positive effects on comprehension were found for instruction that included these strategies. No studies specifically isolated the effects of these strategies.
- **Inference** training was examined alone in one study,<sup>22</sup> and in combination with other strategies in two additional studies.<sup>23</sup> All three studies found positive effects on reading comprehension for students who received inference training.
- **Retelling** was found by four studies to have positive effects on comprehension,<sup>24</sup> although only one of the four focused closely on retelling as a key component of the instructional practices it tested.<sup>25</sup> The other four studies tested the effectiveness of teaching students to retell in combination with other comprehension strategies.

Several studies examined the effectiveness of approaches that teach multiple comprehension strategies. Two studies found that for students who struggle to understand what

they read, teaching multiple comprehension strategies and instructing them to choose among the ones they know improve their reading comprehension.<sup>26</sup> Another study found that students who were quickly taught multiple strategies along with an explanation of how to select and apply them and then were offered an extended period to use them in combination had better reading comprehension than did students who were taught a number of individual strategies more slowly without either an explanation of how to connect them or designated opportunities to use them in combination.<sup>27</sup> The panel believes that teaching strategies with a gradual release of responsibility facilitates strategy learning; however, there is no strong causal evidence that strategy instruction that uses gradual release of responsibility to students improves comprehension any more than strategy instruction without gradual release. Three studies examined multiple-strategy instruction that involved gradual release of responsibility, but neither study tested specifically for the effectiveness of the gradual release of responsibility.<sup>28</sup>

### “Is this strategy instruction?”

What the panel refers to as “strategies” are not the same as comprehension skills typically listed in core reading programs, nor are they teaching activities.

#### What a strategy is:

- Intentional mental actions during reading that improve reading comprehension.
- Deliberate efforts by a reader to better understand or remember what is being read.

#### What a strategy is not:

- Instructional activities such as completing worksheets. Worksheets rarely include instruction in what students should do actively in their heads to improve comprehension.
- Exercises that are aimed at giving students practice with skills such as sequencing or drawing conclusions, but that lack explicit instruction in how to think in these ways during reading.

## How to carry out the recommendation

1. Teach students how to use several research-based reading comprehension strategies.

Teachers should explain to students how to use several strategies that have been shown to improve reading comprehension because different strategies cultivate different kinds of thinking. The panel believes that six strategies that improve reading comprehension, described in Table 3, are the most important for reading comprehension in the primary grades. Teachers should explain how the strategies can help the students learn from text—as opposed to having them memorize the strategies—and how to use the strategies effectively.

<b>Table 3. Examples of effective reading comprehension strategies</b>		
<b>Effective Strategy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Activities to Promote Strategy Practice<sup>29</sup></b>
<b>Activating Prior Knowledge/ Predicting</b>	Students think about what they already know and use that knowledge in conjunction with other clues to construct meaning from what they read or to hypothesize what will happen next in the text. It is assumed that students will continue to read to see if their predictions are correct.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pull out a main idea from the text and ask students a question that <i>relates the idea to their experience</i>. Ask them to predict whether a similar experience might occur in the text.</li> <li>2. Halfway through the story, ask students to <i>predict what will happen</i> at the end of the story. Have them explain how they decided on their prediction, which encourages them to make inferences about what they are reading and to look at the deeper meaning of words and passages.</li> </ol>
<b>Questioning</b>	Students develop and attempt to answer questions about the important ideas in the text while reading, using words such as <i>where</i> or <i>why</i> to develop their questions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Put words that are used to formulate questions (e.g., <i>where, why</i>) on index cards, and distribute to students.</li> <li>2. Have students, in small groups, ask questions using these words.</li> </ol>
<b>Visualizing</b>	Students develop a mental image of what is described in the text.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain to students that visualizing what is described in the text will help them remember what they read.</li> <li>2. Have students examine objects placed in front of them, and later a picture depicting a scene. Remove the objects and picture, and ask students to <i>visualize and describe what they saw</i>.</li> <li>3. Read a sentence and describe what you see to the students. Choose sections from the text and ask students to practice visualizing and discussing what they see.</li> </ol>
<b>Monitoring, Clarifying, and Fix Up</b>	Students pay attention to whether they understand what they are reading, and when they do not, they reread or use strategies that will help them understand what they have read.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relate each strategy to a traffic sign (e.g., stop sign—stop reading and try to restate in your own words what is happening in the text; U-turn—reread parts of the text that do not make sense).</li> <li>2. Write different reading comprehension strategies on cards with their signs, and have students work in pairs to apply the strategies to <i>text they do not understand</i>.</li> </ol>