Reading Strategies That Really Work!

Improve your reading skills in preparation for the PSSA test

Woodland Hills High School
Reading & Writing Workshop II

http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Reading/Reading%20Strategies/reading%20strategies%20index.htm
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Strategy 1 – "Annolighting" A Text

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Formulate questions in response to text
- Analyze and interpret elements of poetry or prose
- Draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit (literal) and implicit (figurative) meaning

What is it?
We have all had the experience of teachers suggesting that students highlight the text that they are reading, only to watch them indiscriminately highlight nearly every word on the page. It is clear that learning how to highlight a text as a part of a reading strategy requires some instruction, including some modeling and guided practice. If done well, highlighting can become a very effective reading tool; if done poorly, it is most likely a waste of a student’s time, energy and ink. "Annolighting" a text combines effective highlighting with marginal annotations that help to explain the highlighted words and phrases.

The following lists provide a simple set of goals and guidelines that students could use to increase the effectiveness of their annolighting and, as a result, improve comprehension and understanding of a text.

Purposes/Goals of Annolighting:
- Capture main ideas / key concepts / details of a reading
- Target, reduce and distill the needed information from a text
- Cut down on study and review time when you return to the material increasing your effective and efficient use of time and effort
- Strengthen your reading comprehension

What does it look like?

1. Choose a focus or framework for your highlighting. Ask yourself: What is the purpose or intended goal of this particular reading? (e.g. Main ideas only? Supportive details for an interpretive claim you are making? Definitions and examples of key vocabulary? Culling examples of the writer’s craft? etc.) After you determine the focus, highlight only the targeted information.

2. If possible, do not highlight on a first reading of a text. Rather, divide a page into manageable chunks and read a section once. Then skim the section again and highlight on the second reading. If you try to highlight on the first reading, you may not have a clear sense of the key ideas/concepts or important/relevant details.
3. *Eliminate every single unnecessary word* in a sentence by using a "telegraphic" approach to highlighting. "Telegraphic highlighting" should still allow you to make sense of a sentence or section when you reread it. It may sound picky to take 6—20 words out of each sentence, but the longer the reading, the more it will cut down on unnecessary information as well as re-read time when you return to your highlighted text for review. *Rarely* should you highlight entire sentences unless it is absolutely necessary based on your targeted focus. (See illustration of "telegraphic highlighting" below.)

4. You may want to use multiple colors in your highlighting process. For instance, choose one color for main ideas and another color for supportive detail that may help in sorting the information when you study the material or collect information for a paper, exhibition or project. You may want to use a color to indicate facts or concepts on which you would like clarification or pose as questions.

Below is an excerpt of a reading titled *Shakespeare’s Hamlet and the Nature of Tragedy*. Students were asked to identify the basic elements of tragedy in regard to the hero or protagonist. Note the "telegraphic approach" to the highlighting; when the highlights are read, they should make sense to the reader. Notes on the right side represent possible summary annotations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highlighted Text</th>
<th>Reader Annotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| "Towards the end of the sixteenth century, a new tragic pattern began to emerge, very much richer and deeper than the old one, sounding intimately the depths of the human mind and spirit, the moral possibilities of human behavior, and displaying the extent to which men’s destinies are interrelated one with another. According to this scheme, an ideal tragedy would concern the career of a hero, a man great and admirable in both his powers and opportunities. He should be a person high enough placed in society that his actions affect the well being of many people. The plot should show him engaged in important or urgent affairs and should involve his immediate community in a threat to its security that will be removed only at the end of the action through his death. The hero’s action will involve him in choices of some importance which, however virtuous or vicious in themselves, begin the spinning of a web of circumstances unforeseen by the hero which cannot then be halted and which brings about his downfall. This hostile destiny may be the result of mere circumstance or ill luck, of the activities of the hero’s enemies, of some flaw or failing in his own character, of the operation of some supernatural agency that works against him. When it is too late to escape from the web, the hero-victim comes to realize everything that has happened to him, and in the despair or agony of that realization, is finally destroyed." | **The hero/protagonist:**  
- Admirable  
- High society  
- Actions affect many  
- Makes choices that involve him/her in a web of circumstances  

**Caused by:**  
- Mere circumstance  
- Ill luck  
- Enemies  
- Character flaw  
- Supernatural agency  

**Results:**  
- Realizes too late  
- Creates despair  
- Destruction or death
Strategy 2 – Annotating a Text

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Formulate questions in response to text
• Analyze and interpret elements of poetry or prose
• Draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit (literal) and implicit (figurative) meaning

What is it?
Reading and constructing meaning from a text is a complex and active process; one way to help yourself slow down and develop your critical analysis skills is to annotate the text as you read. What you annotate can be limited by a list provided by the teacher or it can be left up to your own discretion. Suggestions for annotating text can include labeling and interpreting literary devices (metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, symbol, alliteration, etc.); labeling and explaining the writer’s rhetorical devices and elements of style (tone, diction, syntax, narrative pace, use of figurative language, etc.); or labeling the main ideas, supportive details and/or evidence that leads the reader to a conclusion about the text. Of course, annotations can also include questions that the reader poses and connections to other texts that reader makes while reading.

What does it look like?
The way a reader chooses to interact with a text will vary from reader to reader, but here is an example of a poem that has been annotated:

![Annotated Poem Image]
Strategy 3 – The Main Idea Strategy

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Read for meaning
- Identify the main idea of a text to aid comprehension
- Find the main idea and supporting details
- Draw conclusions about the text from the main idea

What is it?
An important task of reading comprehension is to determine the importance and meanings of individual words, sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, and entire texts. Readers decipher the meanings of words within sentences, of sentences within paragraphs, and so on. As readers begin to grasp main ideas, they better understand the purpose of the details—which further strengthens their understanding of those main ideas.

In understanding the concept of a "main idea," it is useful to distinguish between the following terms: topic, main idea, theme, topic sentence, and purpose.

- The **topic** of a text is the subject, or what the text is about. A topic can be expressed as a noun or a noun phrase. Some examples of topics include recycling, mammals, trees of New England, and names.

- An **idea** is what you say about a topic. Ideas, including the **main idea**, are expressed as sentences. If someone asks you to identify the main idea of a passage and you respond with a single word, you haven't said enough; you've probably just identified the topic. Some examples of main ideas include:
  - Recycling is expensive in the short term, but yields long-term savings.
  - All mammals are the same in certain ways.
  - The trees of New England are the most beautiful in the world.
  - It's no fun when someone makes fun of your name.

- A **theme** is an idea that is repeated throughout a text or collection of texts. For example, "the importance of family in shaping identity" is a theme that can be found throughout literature.

- A **topic sentence** is the term used to identify the sentence in a paragraph that contains the main idea. Conventionally, the topic sentence is the first sentence in a paragraph, but not always. It can be at the beginning, the middle, or the end. While some paragraphs don't really have an easily identifiable topic sentence, some have more than one. (Which is the topic sentence in this paragraph?) Nevertheless, topic sentences are useful in determining the relationship between main ideas and supporting details.

- Finally, we often define **purpose** as "what the author is trying to say"—as if an author is never quite capable of saying what he or she means. The work of reading comprehension is best understood as a joint enterprise between author and reader. Authors can't communicate properly by themselves. They need readers to understand them.
What does it look like?
Here's an example of how you might identify main ideas and supporting details. First, read the following paragraph.

Of all the inventions that had an impact on the Chinese culture during Medieval times, the most important was printing. Before there was printing, all books were copied by hand. Books were therefore rare and expensive. The Chinese began printing in the A.D. 500s. They carved characters from an entire page on blocks of wood. They then brushed ink over a wooden page and then laid a piece of paper over the block to make a print. In 1045, a Chinese printer invented printing using moveable type; the books that were made using this process helped spread knowledge throughout China, to a degree that had not been possible before.

• In one word or a short phrase, identify the topic or subject of the paragraph. (A good answer might be "Printing" or "The Chinese invention of printing.") If you are having trouble, you can think aloud and discuss with another student or the class.

• Next, locate the topic sentence and identify the main idea of the paragraph. (The first sentence is a good example of a topic sentence. The main idea of the paragraph is probably that printing was the most important invention because it allowed for the spread of knowledge throughout China.)

• Next, identify the supporting details. In some paragraphs, there may be sentences that are not really related to the main idea and some details are more important than others. Information about how the printing was actually done seems less important than the fact that books were previously made by hand and were therefore rare and expensive. The actual date that moveable type was invented is less important than the (implied) fact that this, in some way, made it even easier to mass-produce books. Consider asking students why this might be the case.

• As a way of getting further into the idea that some details are more important than others, you can make lists of the sentences in a paragraph in descending order of importance. Then, discuss your lists in pairs or groups.
Strategy 4 – Sociograms

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Analyze and interpret elements of character development and plot development
- Make, confirm, and/or revise predictions

What is it?

A sociogram is a visual representation of the relationships among characters in a literary text. Students can make use of pictures, symbols, shapes, colors, and line styles to illustrate these relationships. Sociograms can be used at first to help students understand the relationships among characters. As the story develops, students can add to or revise their sociograms to graphically illustrate the changing relationships, the traits of each character, and the emerging primary and secondary conflicts.

What does it look like?

In a sociogram, the central character(s) is placed at the center of the page, and the other characters are placed around him/her. The spatial relationship on the page should in some way represent each of the character’s relationship with the main character, as well as with each other. Lines/arrows are used to show the “direction and nature” of the relationship (e.g., strength/weakness, friend/foe, dominance/submissiveness, etc.). Students can begin by manipulating small pieces of paper that represent each of the characters; once they have arranged them in the best way to reflect their understanding of the text, the names can then be placed on a larger piece of paper/poster and the rest of the sociogram can be constructed. A number of conventions may be useful in developing sociograms:
- Place the central character(s) at the center of the diagram
- Let the physical distance between characters reflect the perceived psychological distance between the characters
- Let the size/shape/symbol of a character metaphorically represent each personality, importance, one’s power or lack of, etc.
- Show the direction of a relationship by an arrow/line, and its nature by a brief label (the lines can be creatively applied: What might the following types of lines indicate? A jagged line? A wavy line? The thickness of the line? etc.)
- Represent substantiated relationships with a solid line and inferred relationships by a broken line.
- Circle active characters with a solid line; circle significantly absent characters with a broken line.
- Place the characters that support the main character on one side of a dividing line, and antagonistic characters on the other side.
- Illustrate the tone and or theme of a piece by the use of color or visual symbols.
- Explore creative ways to represent a character’s motivation. For example, inside each “character’s circle” might be one or more words that seem to capture the essence of that character. Immediately outside the circle could be a series of arrows that represent the forces that influence that character.
This is an example of a sociogram for Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*. 
Strategy 5 – Listening to Voice

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Questioning the narrator’s or speaker’s assumptions, beliefs, intentions, and bias
- Discriminating between apparent message and hidden agenda
- Interpreting multiple levels of meaning

What is it?
This concept is probably one of the most complex pieces to understand when reading a text; this is due to the interrelationships of so many of the elements that create what we call "a writer's voice."

Definition: Voice can be defined as the writer's awareness and effective use of such elements as diction, tone, syntax, unity, coherence and audience to create a clear and distinct "personality of the writer." which emerges as a reader interacts with the text.

To study "voice," and by doing so, develop one's own writer's voice, the distinct elements or building blocks need to be clearly defined. Don’t worry if you don’t understand every single piece of each element, but try to understand as many as you can.

**Diction** refers to a writer's word choice with the following considerations:
- denotation / connotation of a word
- degree of difficulty or complexity of a word
- level of formality of a word
- tone of a word (the emotional charge a word carries)
*all of the above will often create a subtext for the text

**Tone** refers to a writer's ability to create an attitude toward the subject matter of a piece of writing; the tools a writer uses to create tone:
- diction
- figurative language
- characterization
- plot
- theme

**Syntax** refers to the arrangement--the ordering, grouping, and placement--of words within a phrase, clause, or sentence. Some considerations:
- type of sentence
- length of sentence
- subtle shifts or abrupt changes in sentence length or patterns
- punctuation use
- use of repetition
- language patterns / rhythm / cadence
- how all of the above factors contribute to narrative pace
- the use of active and/or passive voice
**Unity** refers to the idea that all of the ideas in a written piece are relevant and appropriate to the focus. Some considerations include:

- each claim (assertion, topic sentence) supports the thesis
- each piece of evidence is important and relevant to the focus of the paragraph or the piece of writing as a whole
- occasionally, a writer may choose to purposely violate the element of unity for a specific effect (some humorists/satirists will sometimes consciously do this)
- it is important to consider what has been omitted from a piece and examine the writer's intent in doing so

**Coherence** refers to the organization and logic of a piece of writing; some considerations include:

- precision and clarity in a thesis and supportive arguments
- the arguments ordered in the most effective way for the writer's intent
- the sentences and paragraphs "flow smoothly" for the reader; there should not be any abrupt leaps or gaps in the presentation of the ideas or story (unless the writer makes a conscious choice for a specific and appropriate effect)

**Audience** refers to the writer's awareness of who will be reading his/her piece of writing; some considerations are:

- Who are the targeted readers?
- How well informed are they on the subject? What does the writer want the reader to learn as a result of this piece?
- What first impression is created for the reader and how does the author's voice shape this first impression?
- How interested and attentive are they likely to be? Will they resist any of the ideas?
- What is the relationship between the writer and the reader? Employee to supervisor? Citizen to citizen? Expert to novice? Scholar to scholar? Student to teacher? Student to student?
- How much time will the reader be willing to spend reading?
- How sophisticated are the readers in regard to vocabulary and syntax?

Writers do not rank or prioritize these elements of voice; but rather it is how a writer weaves these threads together that create the tapestry of "writer's voice."

**What does it look like?**

One of the best ways to begin and develop an exploration of writer’s voice during the reading process is to begin with very short piece: poetry, short nonfiction or fiction texts, or an excerpt from a longer text that you are currently reading. At the beginning, the shorter the text and the more powerful the voice, the better.

Using the acronym, “DUCATS” (Diction, Unity, Coherence, Audience, Tone, Syntax), highlight and annotate examples of each element of voice.

On the next page is the opening page of Jerry Spinelli’s young adult novel, Crash; the page was copied, and students were asked to annotate the text for writer’s voice, specifically targeting diction, tone, syntax, and audience.
1 My Name

My real name is John. John Coogan. But everybody calls me Crash, even my parents.

It started way back when I got my first football helmet for Christmas. I don’t really remember this happening, but they say that when my uncle Hern’s family came over to see our presents, as they were coming through the front door I got down into a four-point stance, growled, “Hut! Hut! Hut!” and charged ahead with my brand new helmet. Seems I knocked my cousin Bridget clear back out the doorway and onto her butt into a foot of snow. They say she bawled bloody murder and refused to come into the house, so Uncle Hern finally had to drag his whole family away before they even had a chance to take their coats off.

Like I said, personally I don’t remember the whole thing, but looking back at what I do remember, about myself, I’d have to say the story is probably true. As far as I can tell, I’ve always been crashing—into people, into things, you name it, with or without a helmet.

Actually, I lied a minute ago. Not everybody calls me Crash. There’s one person who doesn’t. It’s just one of a million things that have bugged me for years about this kid. I can still remember the first time I saw him. The summer before first grade, seven years ago.
Strategy 6 – Vocabulary in Text

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Read for meaning
- Make, confirm or revise predictions based on words presented in the text
- Understand the parts of words (prefixes, suffixes)

What is it?
When authors write, they often include context clues to the meaning of words they use but think that some of their readers may not know. The context clue is usually presented in the sentence or paragraph in which the word occurs. Sometimes a visual such as a picture is provided.

Additionally, the PSSA often asks you to identify the meanings of parts of words (prefixes, suffixes) in relation to other words with similar prefixes and suffixes. In order to successfully figure these out, you must understand the meaning of the word and also its parts.

What does it look like?
Here are six types of context clues used by authors to help the reader understand the meanings of words. An example is provided for each.

1. Definition context clue - The author includes a definition to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, "tainted" is defined as having a disease.
   The people of the town were warned not to eat the tainted fish. The local newspaper published a bulletin in which readers were clearly told that eating fish that had a disease could be very dangerous. This was especially true for fish caught in Lake Jean.

2. Synonym context clue - The author includes a synonym to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. A synonym is a word that means the same as or nearly the same as another word. In the following example, the synonym "pity" helps the reader understand the meaning of "compassion."
   After seeing the picture of the starving children, we all felt compassion or pity for their suffering.

3. Antonym context clue - The author includes an antonym to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. An antonym is a word that means the opposite of another word. In the following example, the antonym "eager" helps the reader understand the meaning of "reluctant."
   Joe was reluctant to take on the position of captain of the basketball team. He was afraid that the time it would take would hurt his grades. On the other hand, Billy was eager for the chance to be captain. He thought that being captain of the team would make him very popular in school.

4. Description context clue - The author includes one or more descriptions to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, descriptions of President Kennedy as having charm, enthusiasm, and a magnetic personality help the reader understand the meaning of "charismatic."
   After seeing the picture of the president, we all felt that he was a charismatic leader.
John Fitzgerald Kennedy, our 35th president, improved human rights and equal rights for all people. He was a very charismatic president. People were attracted to his charm and enthusiasm. His personality was described as magnetic.

5. Summary context clue - The author makes a number of statements that help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, statements about being rude, showing no respect, having poor manners, and being impolite help the reader understand the meaning of "impertinent."

Andrea was a very impertinent young lady. She was so rude that she talked while her teacher was explaining a lesson. She showed no respect for other students. Her manners were very poor. Even her parents thought that Andrea was impolite.

6. Visual context clue - The author includes a picture, drawing, chart, graph, or other type of visual to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, the picture and its caption that is close to the sentence helps the reader understand that "exultant" means great joy.

Peggy had an exultant look on her face.

She was exultant.
Strategy 7 – Anticipation Guide

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Draw upon prior knowledge
- Recognize the effects of one’s own point of view in formulating interpretations of texts

What is it?
When skillful readers pick up a new book, their minds go into “anticipation mode;” they have developed a set of strategies that help them get ready to read. They examine such things as the cover and its artwork, the book flaps, excerpts from the reviews, the writer's biography, and the number of pages and print size; often these readers will open to several points in the text to sample the style and voice of the writer. Struggling readers will often skip all of these strategies as possible ways to approach a text, but activities that will help you to anticipate "the big ideas" that will be revealed, it may provide an initial "hook" that draws you into the text.

What does it look like?
Anticipation Guides are often structured as a series of statements with which the students can choose to agree or disagree. They can focus on the prior knowledge that the reader brings to the text, or the "big ideas" or essential questions posed (implicitly or explicitly) by the writer as a way for the reader to clarify his/her opinions before reading the text and then compare them to the writer's message as they read.

Anticipation Guide – Hamlet

Directions: On the continuum in front of each of the numbers, place an "x" that indicates where you stand in regard to the statement that follows. Be prepared to defend and support your opinions with specific examples. After reading the text, compare your opinions on those statements with the author's implied and/or stated messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Families generally have a member's best interests in mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Having a clear goal, and the ambition to achieve it, is honorable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Power eventually corrupts the people who have it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Revenge is the only way to gain true justice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A person's immoral choices can come back to haunt him/her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. One must take a stand against injustice, even if the personal cost is great.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A person has to confront death in order to understand life's meaning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Moral courage is more difficult to accomplish than physical courage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Evil often spirals out of control.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy 8 – Checking Out the Framework

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Previewing texts to assess content and organization
- Recognize and use text features

What is it?
When readers approach a new text, there are several strategies that are “automatic” for a skilled reader, but generally are not practiced by struggling readers. The skilled reader knows that different types of texts are organized in different ways and having an understanding of the various structures provides a solid foundation for the reading experience. Many of the suggestions below may seem basic to us, but many students do not use these strategies; they simply open the book and start reading (or not) on page one. Consciously developing these simple strategies will give you some very important building blocks.

What does it look like?
Use a chart like the one below to check out different parts of a text and record your reactions. You may record your reactions in the chart, or you may annotate the text before you begin reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items to Check Out</th>
<th>Record Information and/or Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong>: Any predictions, questions, clues, or connections?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong>: Familiar with? Still living? Interesting facts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section Headings</strong>: What do the section headings suggest about the reading?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pictures, Graphics, Charts</strong>: What connections are there between these and the text? Captions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Strategy 9 – Metaphor Analysis**

**Use this Strategy:**
During Reading
After Reading

**Targeted Reading Skills:**
- Draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit and implied meaning
- Use textual evidence to substantiate interpretive claims

**What is it?**
This strategy is particularly helpful when students need to understand an extended metaphor. Often students can grasp either the overall meaning or only one or two of the metaphor’s components, but this will help them to construct a detailed analysis of the entire metaphor.

**What does it look like?**
A three-column chart will help you to establish coherence for the analysis, build an interpretation piece by piece, and organize the evidence you gather from the text to support your interpretation. It is a strategy that helps you “get inside” the metaphors; and by constructing your own meaning, you arrive at an understanding of the writer’s intent or message.

Below is a short passage from Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*; students were asked to use the chart to help them prepare for a detailed written analysis of the metaphor/simile.

"Time’s passage through the memory is like molten glass..."

**Metaphor/Simile Analysis: "Time’s passage through the memory is like molten glass..."**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Superficial Level</strong></th>
<th><strong>Metaphorical/Interpretative</strong></th>
<th><strong>Evidence from the Text, the World, &amp; other Literature</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time’s passage through the memory is like molten glass</td>
<td>Time and one’s memories have an irregular, but unstoppable flow ...</td>
<td>At middle age, when Mattie arrives at Brewster Place, seeing a simple house plant transports her back in time to the first event that set her on this long journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that can be opaque or crystallize at any given moment at will: a thousand days can are melted into one conversation, one glance, one hurt, ...</td>
<td>Some memories are incomplete or cloudy, while others create a dramatic focal point in one’s life</td>
<td>... As Mattie stares sadly at the ramshackle apartment, a memory of her first night at Miss Eva’s home, a home that she loved for many years, with its smells, its warmth and its love is in sharp focus in her mind’s eye, and a tear rolls down her cheek.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion / Summary / Statement of Writer’s Intent / Questions Posed . . .**

This metaphor could be applied to many of the women of Brewster Place . . .those unexpected, but definitive events in their lives that stole or altered their dreams.

Is Naylor’s mixed metaphor purposeful? Time’s passage turns from molten glass to waves? (fluidity?)
Strategy 10 – Inferential Reading

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Draw upon prior knowledge
- Draw conclusions and make inferences
- Recognize the effects of one’s own point of view in formulating interpretations of texts

What is it?

Inferences are a thinking strategy that requires that they use text clues and background knowledge. In reading, inferences help us to identify or explain ideas that are not directly stated in the text. We make inferences every day based on our peers’ physical appearance, actions, speech, or based on teachers’ facial expressions, body language and room arrangement. What students need to do is transfer those skills and strategies to their interactions with text.

What does it look like?

Read this brief passage:
"The men walked down the streets to the mine with their heads bent close to their chests. In groups of five or six they scurried on. It was impossible to recognize individuals from the small gaps between their caps, pulled down over their eyes, and the tightly bound scarves tied tightly over the bottom half of their faces".

Now answer this question:
What was the weather like as the men walked to the mine?

You should have been able to work out that it was very cold and windy. You probably arrived at this answer because you associated hats pulled down and scarves with winter or cold weather at least. You know from personal experience people keep their heads down when walking against the wind and the author gave you another clue with the word "scurried" which suggests the men were hurrying to reach their destination.

To tackle this question you have used the skill of inferring. This is sometimes called 'reading between the lines.' Writers expect you to use this skill to get the most out of any piece of reading.
Types of Inferences Skilled Readers Use:

- Understand intonation of characters’ words
- Identify characters’ beliefs, personalities, and motivations
- Understand characters’ relationships to one another
- Provide details about the setting
- Provide explanations for events or ideas that are presented in the text
- Offer details for events or their own explanations of the events
- Understand the author’s view of the world
- Recognize the author’s biases
- Relate what is happening in the text to their own knowledge of the world
- Offer conclusions from facts presented in the text
Strategy 11 – Compare/Contrast

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Make critical comparisons across texts
• Compare important details about a topic
• Recognize compare/contrast text structure

What is it?
When students compare and contrast, they are finding similarities and differences in what they are reading. Understanding the concept of comparing and contrasting includes recognizing synonyms and antonyms, how things are alike and how they are different, and identifying similarities and differences. Often the reading PSSA will ask you to read two related passages and answer questions about similarities and differences between them.

Also, some nonfiction text is organized used a compare/contrast framework. In this type of writing, a writer compares two ideas, events, or phenomena, showing how they are similar and different. The writer states the issues or concepts being compared and explains them in enough detail to help the reader understand why the comparison is significant. Within the text the writers use description as well as comparison/contrast to make points. There are some words that often signal such a text:
• while
• yet
• but
• rather
• either
• like and unlike
• some
• as opposed to
• as well as
• on the other hand
• although
• the same
• similarly

What does it look like?
Venn Diagrams, T-Charts, and “Connect-Two” activities are useful ways to identify similarities and differences between two readings. There are examples of these graphic organizers on the next page. Use one or both to compare and contrast the readings.

When reading a text that is organized in a compare/contrast framework, highlight the signal words in the text. Annotate what is being compared and what is being contrasted. This will help you make connections to other parts of the passage.
Sample Venn Diagram
This is to be used for comparing and contrasting two readings.

Sample T-Chart
This is intended to be used to identify similarities and differences between two passages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities between passages</th>
<th>Differences between passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connect-Two Activity
Choose two ideas from the passage(s) and fill in the blanks below. Repeat with other ideas.

___________________________ and _________________________ are connected
because ___________________________________________ ___________________________

_____________________________ and _________________ ______________ are similar
because ___________________________________________ ___________________________

_____________________________ and _________________ ______________ are different
because ___________________________________________ ___________________________
Strategy 12 – Think Aloud

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Formulate questions prior to reading and in response to the text
- Make, confirm or revise predictions based on information presented in the text

What is it?
As the title implies, a think aloud is a great strategy to use to slow down the reading process and let students get a good look at how skilled readers construct meaning from a text. Below is a beginning list of what skilled readers do implicitly; students need to learn and apply these skills/strategies on a regular basis to improve their interactions with text.

What Skilled Readers Do While They Read:
- **Activate prior knowledge:** Whenever skilled readers approach a text for the first time, they consciously (or unconsciously) summon any information or background that they have in relation to the topic, idea, people/characters, setting, historical context, author, similar events, etc. This process provides a footing or foundation for the reading; it helps us to make sense of the new text. This is an important step that inexperienced readers often skip over.
- **Set a purpose/reason/goal for reading:** Another step that becomes automatic for skilled readers is establishing what they expect to get out of the reading. Depending on the purpose, we adjust our reading in order to meet the chosen goal. Helping our students to define the reason, purpose or goal for the reading is a crucial initial step in helping them to successfully interact with the text. Are they reading for pleasure/entertainment? To gather information? To support a thesis? To answer an essential question? etc.
- **Decode text into words and meanings:** These are the basic reading skills that our children begin to learn at the elementary level; but as secondary teachers, we must continue to work on them as the texts become more varied and sophisticated. Decoding text into words and meaning can also involve using strategies to define unfamiliar words using context clues or word parts (e.g., prefixes, suffixes, roots).
- **Make personal connections:** As skilled readers move through a text, they constantly compare and contrast their knowledge and experience with what is presented and revealed in the text. This process of “personal engagement” in the text improves the reader’s comprehension and understanding. Skillful readers often ask themselves (consciously or unconsciously) the following questions as they read: How is this like or unlike something I know or have experienced? How can I connect the ideas here to other texts I have read? How is this text (and the ideas presented in it) useful or relevant to me?
- **Make predictions:** From the moment a skilled reader picks up a text, they start making predictions about it. They look at such things as the title, table of contents, dedication, number of pages, font size, photographs, commentary on the back or book jacket, etc.; and they begin to make predictions about the contents, quality and their initial reactions to the text. As their reading progresses, they continue to check and revise their initial reactions and predictions.
- **Visualize:** One of the most powerful tools that skilled readers develop is their ability to visualize what they are reading. While reading a fictional text they may create a mental picture of the setting, imagine what the characters look like, in short, immerse themselves in the visual world of the story. In a nonfiction text that is abstract in nature, the reader may create visual symbols, concept webs, or mind maps that help him/her to keep track of the information and organize it.
• **Ask questions:** Good readers make a habit of asking questions while they read. They ask questions about the text, the writer, their own responses, opinions, and reactions to the reading. They may be questions that probe deeper for understanding, but they may simply be questions that voice their internal confusion and need for clarity. When explicitly taught, this is a skill that often will shock some of your less skilled readers; they often think that it is time to stop reading when they become confused, assuming that good readers never get confused. It is powerful for them to see/hear someone work through their confusion.

• **Monitor understanding and summarize:** Skillful readers carry an “invisible suitcase” of information with them as they read a text. Along the way, they drop important items into the case that help them to make sense of the text; if something doesn’t make sense they unpack it and take a closer look. They review those collected items at various points in the reading in order to move toward understanding, synthesis and evaluation of the text.

• **Apply what has been learned:** Both during and after the reading, skillful readers are constantly asking themselves, “How can I use this information?” “What does this story mean to me?” “How can I apply this in my own life?” “Is this relevant to other situations or circumstances?” When students are reading a text to fulfill the demands of a task or prompt, they may keep the demands of the prompt in mind, consider how they will apply information from the text to complete an assigned task. More generally, discovering how a reading applies to our lives and the world around us is essential for engaging a reader in a text. We need to help our students discover the ways to reflect on how the reading “applies.”

**What does it look like?**

**Step 1:** Begin with a short section of a text (1-2 pages).

**Step 2:** Choose 3-5 strategies on which you want to focus from the list. (Activate Prior Knowledge, Make Predictions, Ask Questions, etc.) Discuss the what, why and when of these strategies: what the strategies are that you will be using, why each of these strategies help on this particular text, and keep track of when you use them as you read the text.

**Step 3:** Predict the purpose or goal for this reading or identify it if you already know.

**Step 4:** Read the text aloud, applying the chosen strategies as you read by stopping (sometimes even in the middle of sentences!) to articulate aloud what is going on inside your head as you read.

**Step 5:** Annotate the text as it is being read by underlining/circling the cues that triggered the use of a particular strategy and discuss them after the read-aloud is complete.

**Step 6:** As a group, brainstorm a list of other texts and circumstances where you might be able to use each of the strategies. Try to connect these strategies to real life applications. (e.g. How do we judge the tone of a school when we walk into it, and what clues might a writer use to create a chosen tone in his/her description of that school?)

**Step 7:** Consistently use these strategies as you continue reading this text and as you are introduced to new texts.
Strategy 13 – Collaborative Annotation

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Recognize the features of different literary genres
• Make inferences and draw conclusions based on explicit and implied information

What is it?
This is a technique that is used after students have already completed their own individual annotations on a poem or prose passage; it is a great strategy to stimulate a small or large group discussion that engages and honors different perspectives on the same text. In groups of 3-5, students pass their annotated copy to the person on the right. Each individual focuses on, and makes additions to, the original reader’s commentary; the next time the papers pass, each individual adds his/her commentary to both of the previous readers’ commentary and this process continues until the original reader has his/her paper back. Thus, each student has had three or four people build and expand on his/her ideas, and the groups can discuss their annotations.

What does it look like?
Below is a model of one student’s paper after two others added their collaborative annotations; each color represents a different student's annotations:
Strategy 14 – Summarizing

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Condense or summarize ideas from one or more texts
• Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information

What is it?
Summarizing synopsizes a selection’s main argument in brief. The key to summarizing is being able to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ideas and examples. The main ideas form the backbone, the strand that holds the various parts and pieces of the text together. Listing the main ideas helps you to discover this structure.

Summarizing begins with listing main ideas, but instead of ending with a list of main ideas, a summary recomposes them to form a new text. Summarizing requires creative synthesis. Putting ideas together again -- in your own words and in a condensed form -- shows how reading critically can lead to deeper understanding of any text. When you summarize, use as few of the text’s exact words as you can.

What does it look like?

Read the passage below and highlight main ideas.

So That Nobody Has To Go To School If They Don't Want
by Toby Roger Sipher

A decline in standardized test scores is but the most recent indicator that American education is in trouble.

One reason for the crisis is that present mandatory-attendance laws force many to attend school who have no wish to be there. Such children have little desire to learn and are so antagonistic to school that neither they nor more highly motivated students receive the quality education that is the birthright of every American.

The solution to this problem is simple: Abolish compulsory-attendance laws and allow only those who are committed to getting an education to attend.

This will not end public education. Contrary to conventional belief, legislators enacted compulsory-attendance laws to legalize what already existed. William Landes and Lewis Solomon, economists, found little evidence that mandatory-attendance laws increased the number of children in school. They found, too, that school systems have never effectively enforced such laws, usually because of the expense involved.

There is no contradiction between the assertion that compulsory attendance has had little effect on the number of children attending school and the argument that repeal would be a positive step toward improving education. Most parents want a high school education for their children. Unfortunately, compulsory attendance hampers the ability of public school officials to enforce legitimate educational and disciplinary policies and thereby make the education a good one.
Private schools have no such problem. They can fail or dismiss students, knowing such students can attend public school. Without compulsory attendance, public schools would be freer to oust students whose academic or personal behavior undermines the educational mission of the institution.

Has not the noble experiment of a formal education for everyone failed? While we pay homage to the homily, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," we have pretended it is not true in education.

Ask high school teachers if recalcitrant students learn anything of value. Ask teachers if these students do any homework. Quite the contrary, these students know they will be passed from grade to grade until they are old enough to quit or until, as is more likely, they receive a high school diploma. At the point when students could legally quit, most choose to remain since they know they are likely to be allowed to graduate whether they do acceptable work or not.

Abolition of archaic attendance laws would produce enormous dividends.

First, it would alert everyone that school is a serious place where one goes to learn. Schools are neither day-care centers nor indoor street corners. Young people who resist learning should stay away; indeed, an end to compulsory schooling would require them to stay away.

Second, students opposed to learning would not be able to pollute the educational atmosphere for those who want to learn. Teachers could stop policing recalcitrant students and start educating.

Third, grades would show what they are supposed to: how well a student is learning. Parents could again read report cards and know if their children were making progress.

Fourth, public esteem for schools would increase. People would stop regarding them as way stations for adolescents and start thinking of them as institutions for educating America's youth.

Fifth, elementary schools would change because students would find out early they had better learn something or risk flunking out later. Elementary teachers would no longer have to pass their failures on to junior high and high school.

Sixth, the cost of enforcing compulsory education would be eliminated. Despite enforcement efforts, nearly 15 percent of the school-age children in our largest cities are almost permanently absent from school.

Communities could use these savings to support institutions to deal with young people not in school. If, in the long run, these institutions prove more costly, at least we would not confuse their mission with that of schools.

Schools should be for education. At present, they are only tangentially so. They have attempted to serve an all-encompassing social function, trying to be all things to all people. In the process they have failed miserably at what they were originally formed to accomplish.

The paragraph below is a summary of the article you just read.

Roger Sipher makes his case for getting rid of compulsory-attendance laws in primary and secondary schools with six arguments. These fall into three groups—first that education is for those who want to learn and by including those that don't want to learn, everyone suffers. Second, that grades would be reflective of effort and elementary school teachers wouldn't feel compelled to pass failing students. Third, that schools would both save money and save face with the elimination of compulsory-attendance laws.

Now, look back at the main ideas you highlighted in the article and determine how many of them are included in the summary.
Strategy 15 – Conversations Across Time

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Condense or summarize ideas from one or more texts
- Compare and contrast information from one or more texts
- Make text-to-text, text-to-self, and/or text-to-world connections

What is it?
One of the reasons people read great fiction and nonfiction is to provide a window into another’s experience and understanding of the world. It is important to immerse ourselves in a variety of perspectives and to engage in dialogue that expands and deepens our thinking on issues, events, or people’s actions. In order for readers to develop their critical thinking, they need opportunities to compare and contrast different perspectives and opinions on the same topic.

What does it look like?
After reading several related passages, come up with one central idea and write it as a question. Fill in that question in the center of a graphic organizer similar to the one below. (Here, a question is already written.) Complete the graphic organizer based on the readings as preparation for a small group discussion where you share your ideas and gather new ideas. Record how each passage addresses the central question. In the fourth quadrant, answer the question from your own vantage point, which helps you to make text-to-text and text-to-self connections. Cite evidence from the text(s) to support your claims.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage 1</th>
<th>Passage 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Is the world a fair and just place?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the world a fair and just place?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage 3</th>
<th>Your Experience</th>
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Strategy 16 – Frame of Reference

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Relate new information to prior reading and/or experience
- Understand relationships between texts and their historical, social and cultural contexts
- Make, confirm, or revise predictions

What is it?
When skilled readers approach the reading of a fiction or nonfiction text, they automatically summon up prior knowledge of any information or experience that will provide a foundation and/or context for the text. One of the ways we can explicitly teach our students this strategy is to have them consciously create a framework for their reading. When readers create these connections, it engages them right from the beginning and helps them to deepen their understanding. This strategy asks the reader to summon *what they know* about the topic, place, event, or issue and to think about *how they know* that information. Taking a critical look at *how* we gather our knowledge on a topic is an important step in evaluating its depth and validity.

What does it look like?
*Frame of Reference* is a graphic organizer that helps students to access prior knowledge as well as the sources by which they gathered that knowledge. This visual mimics the structure of how a photograph or drawing might be “framed.” The diagram on the next page illustrates the blank template; the topic, event or issue is labeled in the center; a student’s notes on what they know about that topic are written (in single words or phrases) inside the interior rectangle, and *how* the student gathered that information is (the people, texts, events that influenced their thinking) in the outer rectangle.
Frame of Reference Diagram

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How I know what I know…</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I know about the topic…</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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Strategy 17 – Questions Only

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Formulate questions to be answered by reading informational or literary texts
• Recognize the effects of one’s own point of view in formulating interpretations of texts
• Identify multiple levels of meaning

What is it?
Typically, a teacher’s goal in teaching reading strategies is for students to identify key ideas and formulate interpretations based on the texts they read. However, one of the ways students can raise their awareness of the complexity of the reading process and at the same time reflect on the reading is to generate questions only about the reading as a springboard for discussion and/or writing. If one goal is to develop more insightful interpretations of text, then it is necessary to learn how to ask more insightful questions of the texts we read.

What does it look like?
To begin with, you should choose an area of focus for your questions; the questions can target content, process, skills, and/or any chosen area. Preview the PSSA’s multiple choice questions to see what type of questions are asked to decide how to focus the questions you will ask as you read. Most often the questions students want to pose will come right off the page at them; however, it is a good strategy to challenge and refine your skills by formulating increasingly complex questions about the texts you read. It can become particularly powerful when we consider both the writer’s content, process and/or text structure. The model on the next page is based on a poem; however, this strategy is effective for both fiction and nonfiction texts.
The following exemplar illustrates the types of questions students might generate on Marge Piercy's poem, *A Work of Artifice*, as they explore a multi-genre unit on social justice as it relates to women's issues. Represented are questions that a student might ask on a first or second reading of the poem.

---

**A Work of Artifice**

The bonsai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
til' split by lightning,
but a gardener
carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.  
Every day as he
whistles back the branches
the gardener croons,
It is your nature
to be small and cozy,
domestic and weak;
how lucky, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in.
With living creatures
one must begin very early
to dwarf their growth:
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you
love to touch.

---

by Marge Piercy

---

What else has she written?
A feminist?
Strategy 18 – Cause & Effect

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Analyze the relationship between cause and effect
- Make, confirm or revise predictions based on information presented in the text
- Draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit and implied information

What is it?
A cause and effect analysis is an attempt to understand why things happen as they do. People in many professions—accident investigators, scientists, historians, doctors, newspaper reporters, automobile mechanics, educators, police detectives—spend considerable effort trying to understand the causes and effects of human behavior and natural phenomena to gain better control over events and over ourselves. If we understand the causes of accidents, wars, and natural disasters, perhaps we can avoid them in the future. If we understand the consequences of our own behavior, perhaps we can modify our behavior in a way that will allow us to lead happier, safer lives.

What does it look like?
Developing the ability to think and talk intelligently about causes and effects will grow naturally over time, as students take part in multiple conversations about why things happen as they do, how one thing leads to another, how a single event can have multiple causes—and multiple consequences—and how some consequences are intended and some are not. It is not a strategy that can be mastered in a few lessons. It all begins with how you structure classroom discussions.

Here are some general guidelines for incorporating cause and effect into discussions:
- Always ask why. Why did the fish in the classroom aquarium die? Why were slaves more important in the South than in the North? Why do people continue to commit crimes after being released from prison? What are the causes and effects of bullying in schools?
- After you answer the Why questions, ask and answer, "How do you know? What is your evidence?" Find research or texts to justify their position.
- Consider multiple causes of events. Make lists of possible causes of events, and then try to determine which are more likely, or important, than others.
- Consider multiple consequences. How did World War II change life in America? What happens when we waste electricity? What are some of the likely consequences of global warming? What consequences does the behavior of a character in a story have on the lives of other characters?
- Use graphic organizers, such as cause-and-effect chains, flow charts, and feedback loops, to help you think about complex cause-and-effect relationships.
- Develop the vocabulary of cause and effect. Teach power words such as consequence, consequently, influence, and as a result. Also teach qualifiers such as partly responsible
for and largely because of. Qualify cause-and-effect statements with words such as possibly, probably, or almost certainly. Explain that whenever there is doubt (as there often is in matters of cause and effect), qualifying words actually strengthen an argument. Compare the following sentences, and ask students to consider which statement is easier to agree with.

- The author created a happy ending in order to please the reader.
- The author probably created a happy ending in order to please the reader.

* Connect your understanding of cause-and-effect relationships to your writing. Writers use the language of cause and effect to inform, to persuade, and to provide their readers with an understanding of order. Identify and describe cause-and-effect relationships in their writing. Use graphic organizers to illustrate your ideas.
Strategy 19 – Dense Questioning

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Interpret and synthesize recurring themes/ideas
- Pose personally relevant questions about texts
- Relate new information to prior reading and/or experience by making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections

What is it?
Using this strategy teaches you to ask different types of questions. In dense questioning, students develop a series of questions that get increasingly more sophisticated. It begins with the reader posing a question about the text and then moving through each of the categories listed below:

- Text
- Reader
- Connections to World or Other Literature
- Text-to-Reader
- Text-to-World
- Text-to-Other Literature
- Reader-to-World
- Reader-to-Other Literature
- Dense Question

When students pose questions about a text using these multiple perspectives it is bound to make their interaction with and understanding of the text deeper and richer.

What does it look like?
The dense questioning strategy can be organized in chart form (see model on the next page) or in overlapping circles, as shown above. When you use the dense questioning strategy, it is a good idea to write your questions in the margins.
## Dense Questioning – The Catcher in the Rye

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Questions Generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Information found in the text</td>
<td>Who is the narrator of the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
<td>Reader’s experience, values, and ideas</td>
<td>Have you ever felt fed up with everything and just wanted to take off, get away on your own?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World or Other Literature</td>
<td>Knowledge of history, other cultures, other literature</td>
<td>What other character—in a book or movie—would you compare the main character to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text / Reader</td>
<td>Combines knowledge of text with knowledge of history and other cultures</td>
<td>What characteristics do you share with the main character?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text / Other Literature</td>
<td>Combines knowledge of text with knowledge of other pieces of literature</td>
<td>How does Holden’s relationship with his sister compare with Esperanza’s in The House on Mango Street?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader / World</td>
<td>Combines knowledge of reader’s own experiences with knowledge of other culture and peoples</td>
<td>In what ways are teenagers in other countries similar to American teens? In what ways are they different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader / Other Literature</td>
<td>Combines knowledge of reader’s own experiences with other pieces of literature</td>
<td>In what ways are you similar to and/or different from Holden and Esperanza?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dense question</td>
<td>Combines knowledge of all three areas into one “dense question”</td>
<td>Why does Holden feel alienated and how is that related to what many of today’s teens feel? Include in your answer a discussion of the extent to which you do or don’t share these same feelings and why.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy 20 – Key Concept Synthesis

Use this Strategy:
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
- Condense or summarize ideas from one or more texts
- Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information
- Compare/contrast information from one or more texts
- Make text-to-text, text-to-self, and/or text-to-world connections

What is it?

When students are given “dense” reading material, they often become frustrated and remark, “I read it, but I don’t get it!” or “I didn’t know what was important and what wasn’t.” For many young readers, this frustration builds and they approach difficult texts feeling defeated before they even begin. One strategy we can use is to provide a framework for the reading by creating a focus on the key concepts. The process involves identifying the key concepts as they read, putting those concepts in their own words and explaining why the concept is important and/or making connections to other concepts.

What does it look like?

Using this strategy requires helping students to use a number of textual clues that will help them determine the key concepts in a reading. Some elements that will aid students in the identification of key concepts are:

- Examining the text structure for any elements that the writer/publisher may have used to indicate major divisions in the subject matter (e.g. titles, subtitles, bold headings, and supportive graphics or visuals)
- Determining which sentence in a paragraph is the topic sentence; as texts get more sophisticated, students need to recognize that frequently it may not be the first sentence in the paragraph.
- Learning to identify statements that “forecast” main ideas or key concepts that will come at some point later on in the reading.
- Recognizing that transitions may sometimes help to identify a main idea or a possible shift in the writer’s thinking. (e.g. when compared to, or another possibility is, or in contrast, etc.)
- Examining the summary statements in the paragraphs and/or the conclusions that summarize each section of the reading may help to verify and condense the main ideas or key concepts.
Strategy 21 – QAR

Use this Strategy:
Before Reading
During Reading
After Reading

Targeted Reading Skills:
• Use textual evidence to substantiate textual claims
• Draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit and implied information

What is it?
Question-Answer Relationship or QAR is a great way to help you figure out how to go about answering questions based on a given text. Often we assume that every question’s answer is directly stated somewhere in the text, if only we look hard enough. Thus, many students spend far too much time looking for answers that are not “right there,” and their frustration mounts. Learning the four basic question-answer relationships is a valuable strategy that will help you to understand the different types of questions and know how to effectively and efficiently approach the text based on the different question types.

What does it look like?
Learning to analyze the question-answer relationships will enable you to become skillful at analyzing these types of questions that they are typically asked to respond to when reading a text. The four question-answer relationships are as follows:

• **Right There Questions:** “Right There” questions require you to go back to the passage and find the correct information to answer the question. These are sometimes called literal questions because the correct answer can be found somewhere in the passage. “Right There” questions sometimes include the words, “According to the passage…” “How many…” “Who is…?” “Where is…” “What is…”

• **Think and Search Questions:** “Think and Search” question usually require you to think about how ideas or information in the passage relate to each other. You will need to look back at the passage, find the information that the question refers to, and then think about how the information or ideas fit together. “Think and Search” questions sometimes include the words, “The main idea of the passage…” “What caused…” “Compare/contrast…”

• **Author and You Questions:** “Author and You” questions require you to use ideas and information that is not stated directly in the passage to answer the question. These questions require you to think about what you have read and formulate your own ideas or opinions. “Author and You” questions sometimes include the words, “The author implies…” “The passage suggests…” “The speaker’s attitude…”,

• **On My Own Questions:** “On My Own” questions can be answered using your background knowledge on a topic. This type of question does not usually appear on tests of reading comprehension because it does not require you to refer to the passage. “On My Own” questions sometimes include the words, “In your opinion…” Based on your experience…” “Think about someone/something you know…”

The best way to become proficient at identifying and explaining the above elements is through conscious practice every time you read. Once you can understand and recognize these elements, practice independently on sections of a textbook you are currently reading as preparation for the
next class. As you become more proficient in recognizing these elements as you read, a powerful addition is to identify these elements in your own writing.

The graphic organizer below will help you organize your thoughts to synthesize key elements of a passage.

**Directions:** Use the following graphic organizer to identify the five most important concepts (in the form of single words or phrases) from the reading. Think about identifying the five most important concepts this way: If you had to explain the reading to someone who had not read the text, what are the five most important concepts you would want them to understand? *Use a highlighter and marginal notes to identify important concepts as you read, and then complete the graphic organizer once you have completed the reading.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Key Concepts (with page #s)</th>
<th>Put the Concept in Your own Words Explain Why the Concept is Important</th>
<th>Make Connections to other Concepts</th>
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