

## Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and to integrate with what the reader already knows. Fundamental skills required in efficient reading comprehension are knowing meaning of words, ability to understand meaning of a word from discourse context, ability to follow organization of passage and to identify antecedents and references in it, ability to draw inferences from a passage about its contents, ability to identify the main thought of a passage, ability to answer questions answered in a passage, ability to recognize the literary devices or propositional structures used in a passage and determine its tone, to understand the situational mood (agents, objects, temporal and spatial reference points, casual and intentional inflections, etc.) conveyed for assertions, questioning, commanding, refraining etc. and finally ability to determine writer's purpose, intent and point of view, and draw inferences about the writer (discourse-semantics). Ability to comprehend text is influenced by readers' skills and their ability to process information. If word recognition is difficult, students use too much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to comprehend what is read. There are many reading strategies to improve reading comprehension and inferences, including improving one's vocabulary, critical text analysis (inter textuality, actual events vs. narration of events, etc.) and practicing deep reading.

### Definitions

**According to Wikipedia**, “Reading comprehension is the level of understanding of a text/message. This understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written, and how they trigger knowledge outside the text/message. Comprehension is a "creative, multifaceted process" dependent upon four language skills: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

**According to Kimberley**, “Reading Comprehension is a dynamic process in which information from the text and knowledge possessed by the reader interacts to enable the reader to construct meaning before, during, and after reading.”

**According to Webster’s English Dictionary**, “Reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.”

**According to Collins Dictionary**, “Reading Comprehension, “a text that students use to help them improve their reading skills, by reading it and answering questions relating

to the text. Sometimes used as a test or examination of reading skills. A reading comprehension can be in the student's own or another language.”

**According to Cambridge Dictionary,** “ Reading Comprehension is the ability to understand completely and be familiar with a situation, facts, text etc.

### **Features of Reading Comprehension**

The following are the main features of reading comprehension:

1. Discovering Main Idea
2. Identifying Detail
3. Sequencing Events
4. Using Context
5. Getting Facts
6. Drawing Conclusions/Predicting Outcomes
7. Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion
8. Understanding Cause and Effect
9. Identifying Figurative Language
10. Identifying Bias and Prejudice
11. Using Prior Knowledge
12. Comparing and Contrasting Ideas
13. Generating and Answering Questions
14. Identifying Inferences
15. Summarizing Concepts
16. Understanding Vocabulary
17. Visualizing Ideas
18. Determining Author's Purpose
19. Understanding Point of View

### **Components of Reading Comprehension**

#### **1. Phonemic Awareness**

Phonemic awareness refers to the recognition that words are made of separate sounds (phonemes) combined together. Phonemic skills are entirely based in the sound of a word. When children can hear a word and produce the sounds in isolation, they are mastering phonemic skills. Reading programs address phonemic awareness with rhyming activities and deleting or substituting phonemes to make new words.

#### **2. Phonics**

Phonics is the integration of phonemic awareness with the printed word. It is a method of teaching reading built on a letter to sound correspondence. Instruction in phonics begins

with letter naming and recognition and progresses to learning the sounds that letters make. Eventually children will learn to look at a word, say the sound for each letter and then blend them to make the word. Phonics is essential for decoding (sounding out) words and spelling. If readers do not have phonological awareness, they may spend an inordinate amount of time on pronunciation instead of remembering what they are reading.

### **3. Vocabulary**

Vocabulary development is another important component of a reading program. Sounding out words is not enough. Students must understand the meaning of the words in order to comprehend what they are reading. Vocabulary is taught in two ways: explicitly and implicitly. Teachers use vocabulary lists and give direct instruction on the meaning and usage of each word in explicit instruction. Implicit instruction occurs during reading when children are able to figure out the meanings of words by looking at context clues from pictures or other words in the same sentence or paragraph.

### **4. Fluency**

Fluency is the ability to read accurately and smoothly with expression and at a rate that enables readers to comprehend what they are reading. Fluency should become stronger as a student is exposed to more books and has frequent opportunities to read. Reading programs stress fluency through the use of activities like echo and choral reading, which give students an opportunity to practice good reading skills and emulate the teacher who acts as a fluency model.

### **5. Comprehension**

Comprehension is the culmination of reading skills learned in the other four components of mastering reading. Simply stated, comprehension is the ability to understand what's being read. A student who can decode words, understand their meanings and read fluently will be able to comprehend a story. Comprehension can be assessed with questions that ask readers to identify basic story components like characters, setting and plot. Advanced comprehension, including predicting, summarizing and critical thinking, are introduced in more advanced grade levels after students have a firm grasp of the basics.

## **Levels of Reading Comprehension**

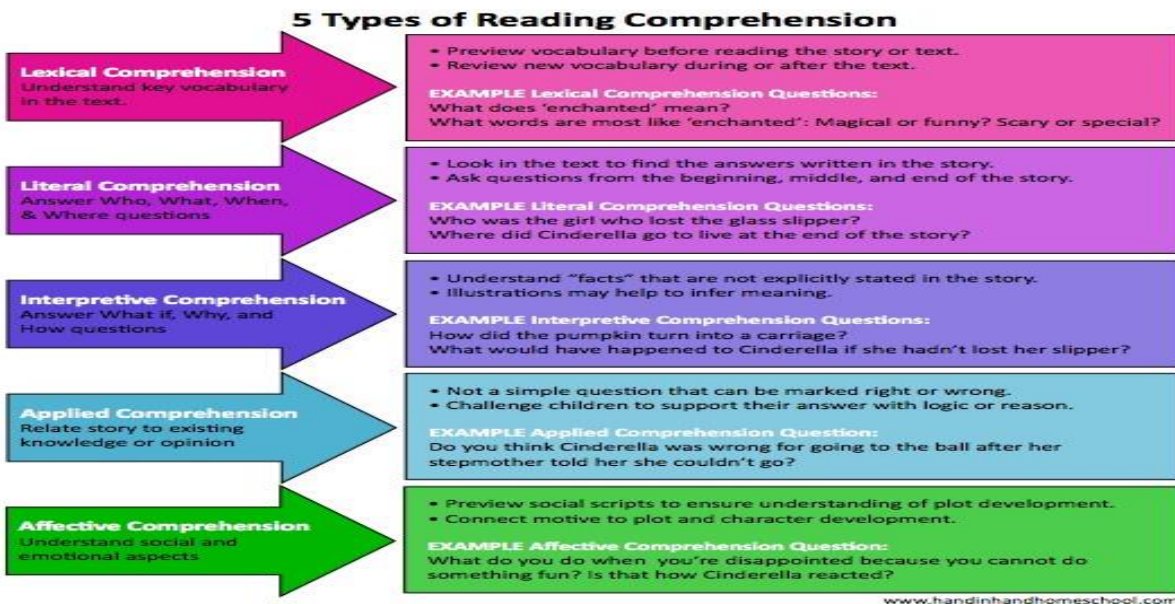
Reading Comprehension is the ability to easily and efficiently read text for meaning. It is the last step of the reading process taught to children, after they've learned phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. The following are the main levels of the reading comprehension:

1. Lexical Comprehension
2. Literal Comprehension

3. Interpretive Comprehension
4. Applied Comprehension
5. Affective Comprehension

- 1. Lexical Comprehension-** Lexical comprehension centers around the understanding of key vocabulary words found in the reading material. It involves understanding the words in a text. This is less of a problem as readers mature because of the broadening scope of their vocabulary. Improving your lexical comprehension is simple: if you don't understand a word, consult a dictionary or thesaurus. Unfortunately, not all words mean exactly what the dictionary tells us, unless you have a comprehensive dictionary that includes idiomatic expressions and colloquial usage. That also includes localisms and dialect, as well as nuances in the use of words. Quite often, we will be able to determine the meanings of words, phrases, and expressions from the lexical milieu—or the surrounding words and paragraphs. The way the words are used, who is using them, what the speaker's expressions are—all these can be determined from the lexical milieu or context. It can get a little more complicated: lexical meaning includes grammatical understanding. If we don't understand the way sentences are structured, we'll have difficulty understanding implied meanings.
- 2. Literal Comprehension-** Literal comprehension focuses on answering the questions like who, what, when and where of the text/story. Literal Comprehension comes from understanding all the facts presented in the story or text. You understand it literally when you can answer the basic questions: who, what, where, and when. Sometimes, understanding at the literal level is easier than lexical comprehension because the facts don't change; word meanings can.
- 3. Interpretive Level of Comprehension-** It involves answering the questions why, how, and what if. This involves reasoning, extrapolation, and prediction. When interpreting literature, we try to figure out characters' motivations, processes, progression, and intention.
- 4. Applied Comprehension-** Applied comprehension is when we try to see the connections between the text and existing knowledge or opinions. We decide things like right or wrong, make judgments and comparisons. The reader uses background information to form opinions.
- 5. Affective Level-** When we attempt to understand the social and emotional aspects of a text, we comprehend the story on an affective level. We are able to connect motives to the development of both plot and character and, thereby, comprehend the story in its entirety, from every possible angle. It is a level of appreciation that improves with maturity and age because then, we are better able to apply the

higher-order thinking skills involved in the latter 3 levels of comprehension. These higher levels of comprehension are what the Short Story Appreciation course aims to achieve.



## Conclusion

Reading comprehension is a complex topic. Predicting success in comprehension requires knowing about the reader, about the text being read, about the task being undertaken, and about the sociocultural context in which the reading is occurring. Since reading comprehension shades into learning, constructing a worldview, and discipline-specific literacy practices, it is difficult to establish firm boundaries around comprehension; nonetheless, it is clear that more attention to comprehension and its levels is needed across the grades. In preschool and primary grades, opportunities for building vocabulary and background knowledge and practicing oral comprehension should be provided while children are learning to decode. In later grades, students need explicit instruction in how texts are constructed and how language cues signal meaning at sentential and discourse levels, as well as practice and support in wrestling with content-rich texts for well-defined and engaging purposes.