

Comprehension

What do we mean by “comprehension”?

- Understanding what you have read
- Getting meaning from what is read
- Remembering what you just read

Some students have many talents – their life skills are amazing, yet even simple ideas when read they aren’t able to related to...

We talk about repetition being important to comprehension – Can be dull to simply re-read over and over. Another way to increase comprehension is to have the student summarize what they just read.

How often should a tutor stop the student for a comprehension “check”? It may not be a good idea to wait until the end of an entire reading (page, exercise, etc.) – may make more sense to stop the student after only a paragraph, then ask, “What does that mean, can you explain that to me?”

Predictive questions can be helpful – If there are pictures, it’s good to ask the student what they expect will be in the reading based on those pictures. If no pictures are available, there are still headings, words in bold or italicized, structure of the writing to use to predict content. Identifying the kind of writing can also help with predictions (for instance, if it is a biographical writing, “what kind of information might the student predict will be contained in the narrative?, if it is a poem, etc.).

While reading, before turning a page or going on to a new section/paragraph – the tutor might ask the student, “What do you think may happen next?”. This is another kind of predictive question that directs the reader’s attention and aids comprehension.

Payng attention to the characters in a story is important to comprehension. Some students can do that with ease, others lose track when pronouns are used after the character has been introduced. The tutor might ask, “Who is ‘she’ referring to here? “ or similar questions to make sure that the student is tracking the story line and comprehending the action.

Some students struggle with comprehending titles, such as Mr., Mrs, Miss, Ms. Don’t assume that they know the meanings of even common terms like this, or with any abbreviation, for that matter. The tutor may need to be more explicit in order to avoid confusion. (Example, one student thought that the term Mr. referred only to a man who is married.)

Other ways to build comprehension that were discussed included reviewing/spiraled learning that refers back to foundational learning that has already been mastered or providing a memory aid/reminder (such as an alphabet strip when a student is working on a dictionary entry exercise) so that the student may more easily focus on the new task at hand.

Motivated students are more likely to read more frequently. If tutors help students to set small, achievable near-term goals, it can help the student remain motivated. (Tutors should remember to use appropriate, positive reinforcement often to celebrate successes.)

If students miss/cancel lessons, it is much harder to retain what has already been learned and to build upon their comprehension skills across gaps in time. If a student has only one hour per week with their tutor, we agreed that will make building upon their comprehension skills much more difficult.

So that students will look at the whole word, rather than just decoding the first syllable and then guessing (sometimes incorrectly), one tutor uses word search puzzles. This game helps her student to look for the whole word, and to think about the middle and endings as well as the start of the word.

Comprehension is improved as students read more fluently. An aid to improving fluency is to have the student read outside of tutoring sessions or homework time- practice improves the "reading muscles." A key to additional time spent reading is to have the student work on "high interest reading". For example, one tutor reported her student likes to read "trash novels" but applauded that because it is something the student enjoys and the extra reading practice is benefitting the student's comprehension and fluency.