

ATASK - Reading Instruction for LEP Students

Tips for Developing Reading Comprehension

To assess and/or develop comprehension of a reading selection:

1. Ask the students literal questions.
2. Ask the students inferential questions.
3. Ask the students to use/apply their comprehension to another context, preferably a context that relates to their daily lives.

Literal Questions:

- The answer appears in the text. The student may read the answer to your question from the text OR rephrase the information in her own words.

Discourage the student from reading the answer to your question from the text. She may not understand what she is reading. Encourage the student to rephrase in her own words. If she is able to do so, she is likely to have some understanding of the words' meaning.

- Easiest questions for students to answer.
- Often students can use one word or a phrase to respond to your question.

Inferential Questions:

- The answer is imbedded in the information in the text. The exact answer does NOT appear in the text.
- Harder for students to answer.
- Usually students must use at least a phrase and often a couple of complex sentences to answer.

- Questions require that students: (1) use the context; (2) get the main idea; and/or (3) draw a conclusion...from what they read.
- Questions may be posed as imperatives such as:
 - Tell about.
 - Describe.
 - Explain.
 - Compare. (not a word known by Level D)
 - Contrast. (not a word known by Level D or E)
 - Summarize. (not a word known by Level D or E)

Application Questions:

- The answer is NOT in the text.
- Hardest questions for students to answer.
- Usually students must use a couple of complex sentences to answer.
- Questions might be posed as imperatives:
 - Give an example.
 - Give an opinion.
 - Guess/Estimate/Project.

Identifying and Addressing Student Comprehension Problems

“ Do You Understand?”

Avoid asking “Do you understand?”. Asian students typically answer this question by saying “yes”. They say “yes” for several reasons. Underlying these reasons are two important cultural values:

1. At all times, in social interaction, the priority is on preserving face.
2. In Asian cultures, the burden is on the student to learn. There is no burden on the teacher to teach well.

Thus, students answer “yes” because:

1. They do not want YOU to lose face. (If they don’t understand, it will be because you did not do a good job of explaining. If you did not do a good job of explaining, YOU will lose face. To avoid having you lose face in this way, they say “yes”!).
2. They do not want to lose face in front of their classmates or in front of you.
3. It’s easier for everyone involved to say “yes” than “no”.

Over 4-6 months, most students develop enough trust with teacher and classmates to answer honestly if they do not understand. They may revert to old behavior when experiencing stress in the classroom or in their outside lives.

Most Common Alternative Strategy for Identifying Student Comprehension Problems

Ask a question or questions that allow you to gauge the student’s comprehension.

Student Appears Not to Understand

There may be several reasons a student appears not to understand what she/you/another student has read.

1. The student is so anxious to read the words correctly that she is not listening to your question.

If so, get the student's full attention (away from the book/words) and ask a question that the student can easily answer...AND THEN ask your original question again.

2. The student does not understand the question you are asking and, therefore, has no hope of answering it.

If so, you need to rephrase your question OR ask a different question.

3. The student is so anxious to read the words correctly that she is not focusing sufficiently on the meaning of the words.

If so, read the sentence(s) outloud to the student. You may need to include somewhat exaggerated intonation and pauses.

and/or,

Have the student read the sentence(s) silently to herself.

4. The student understands what you are asking AND what the words mean BUT she cannot express her understanding. (Keep in mind the student is tackling three tasks at the same time...reading, understanding what is read, and creating an answer...all in her second language!)

If so, you want to ask a series of questions which build in difficulty, helping the student to express her thought.

5. The sentence(s) use slang or an idiom with which the student is unfamiliar.

If so, explain.

6. The context of the reading unfamiliar to the student for cultural reasons or differences in life experience.

If so, explain.