

# Handout: Teaching Reading

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## Components of Reading

There are four basic skill sets that good readers have and use when they read.

### Alphabets

Alphabets is a term used to describe a collection of reading skills needed to decode words effectively. It consists of:

- **Phonemic awareness:** the ability to recognize sounds of the language and manipulate those sounds
- **Word analysis skills, including:**
  - **Phonics:** connecting letters and letter combinations to language sounds
  - **Word patterns:** recognizing and manipulating patterns in words, like *cat, hat, sat, fat...*
  - **Word parts:** using parts of words—like syllables, prefixes, and suffixes—to decode words
- **Strategic decoding:** the ability to use one or more of these skills to decode a word

Students who are not literate in their native languages, or who come from languages that are not alphabetic or do not use the Roman alphabet, will need a lot of instruction in alphabets. However, even students that are literate in native languages that are similar to English will need some instruction in alphabets.

### Vocabulary

Vocabulary is important to reading comprehension in two ways. First, and most obvious, readers need to know what individual words mean to get meaning from the larger text. Second, readers need a good vocabulary to be able to read a broader variety of materials and materials at higher levels. As they read increasingly complex materials, good readers encounter new words, expanding their vocabularies and allowing them to read new things.

There are different types of vocabulary and different levels of understanding. We have an oral vocabulary—the words we use and understand in listening and speaking, and we have a reading vocabulary—the words we recognize and understand in print. We know some words very well and can use them flexibly, taking advantage of the nuances of their meaning. We know other words at a simple level, but we don't recognize their nuances. And then there are words we don't recognize at all. All of this is affected by the background knowledge we bring to reading.

Finally, there are different tiers of vocabulary. The tiers help us identify what to focus on during instruction:

- Tier 1 words are typically nouns, verbs, familiar adjectives, and common sight words. These are the words we focus on first in ESL instruction because they are the words that

will help students communicate their basic needs. Examples of Tier 1 words are food words, colors, days of the week, and simple action verbs.

- Tier 2 words are found in higher level, more sophisticated texts across a variety of content and genres. They typically have multiple or nuanced meanings and are used to provide description and detail. **Once ESL students are able to communicate in English and get their basic needs met, begin focusing on Tier 2 words in reading.** Building ESL students' Tier 2 vocabulary gives them the foundation they need to read higher-level, more sophisticated texts, exposing them to more English. A larger Tier 2 vocabulary will also help them express themselves better when writing and speaking. Examples of Tier 2 words include *exertion, unanimous, rickety, benevolent, and masterpiece.*
- Tier 3 words are specialized vocabulary related to specific topics such as health, finance, technology, or occupations. We will work with ESL students to learn these words as the need arises. Instruction should focus on word meaning for comprehension, not integrating the words into the students' everyday vocabulary. Examples include *abrasion, liability, lease, and excavator.* Note that Tier 3 words may change according to a student's occupation or hobbies. For a construction worker, *excavator* becomes a Tier 1 word – a common noun used every day.

## Fluency

Reading fluency is reading quickly, accurately, and with inflection. Fluency affects reading comprehension in several ways. First, fluent readers can dedicate more of their reading effort to comprehension because they aren't focused on decoding words and putting them together into meaningful phrases and sentences. Fluent readers are also able to read with proper emphasis and inflection (*prosody* is the technical term), which adds meaning. Increased fluency makes reading more pleasant. This means students are likely to read more and become exposed to more English. If they can read more easily, they are more likely to enjoy reading. Finally, when students read aloud during fluency activities, they are able to hear their improvement, and this motivates them to continue learning.

## Reading Comprehension Strategies and Skills

Research indicates that readers must actively engage with what they are reading in order to comprehend it. Good readers are able to apply broad strategies and specific skills to access their existing knowledge, set a purpose for reading, check comprehension, extract important information, and apply what they learn.

*Adapted from Applying Research in Reading Instruction, Susan McShane, 2005*

## Teaching Phonics

Phonics instruction helps students make the connection between the sounds of English and the letters that represent the sounds. Students need this skill to be able to decode the words on a page. Below are the basic steps for teaching a phonics element or principle.

## Steps

1. Identify the letter for the phonics lesson and write it in lower case. Begin by teaching students to recognize the small letter because the majority of letters they see will be in lower case. Students repeat the name of the letter.
2. Selects words from the lesson that begin with the letter and sound. The number of words you pick should be enough to provide students with several examples but not overwhelm them. Start with 3–5 words, then adjust accordingly. Explain that these words begin with the sound the letter makes and model the sound. Say the words and have students listen for the sound. Write the words on the board and read them again.
3. Ask students to read the words. Do this 2–3 times. Always ask students to “read” words, not “say” words to reinforce the fact that they are reading.
4. Ask students to pick a key word. Explain that they will use that word to model and produce the sound of the letter. Ask students to model the sound of the letter.
5. Ask students for examples of other words that begin with this sound. Write these words on the board. Ask students to read these words.
6. Review the name, sound, and key word for the phonics element.
7. Students write the letter, key word, and other words they want to learn.
8. Write and explain the capital letter.

## Suggestions

- Keywords to use as examples of phonics elements and principles can come from anywhere: oral vocabulary from the lesson, a published story, a picture, real world materials, and a student’s own vocabulary. Use materials from the lesson.
- When teaching vowel sounds, you may find it necessary to focus more on recognizing the letter and sound in the middle of the word. Use short, single syllable words as examples.
- The sounds and letters do not need to be taught in alphabetical order. Begin with sounds that are easier for the student to hear and make – such as continuant consonants like /m/ or /s/.

## Word Patterns

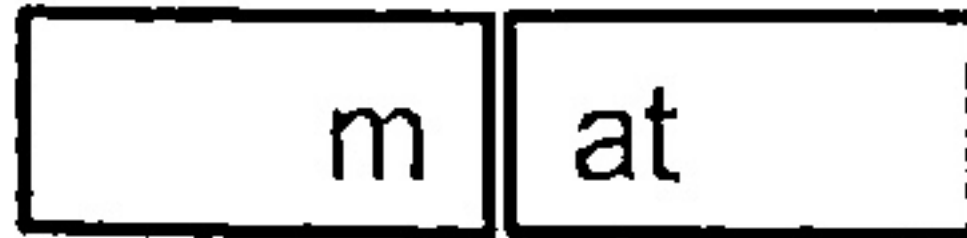
### Index Cards

Use index cards to teach students to use word patterns to create new words.

### Steps

1. Choose 1-2 word patterns to practice. Write each pattern on an index card, left aligned on the card.
2. Brainstorm all of the consonant sounds (including blends and digraphs) the student can use to create a word with the word pattern. Circle the ones the student already knows. Write each one the student knows on an index card, right aligned on the card. If you want to teach the student new sounds, you can write each of the remaining ones on an index card, right aligned on the index card, but keep them in a different stack. It’s helpful if you write the consonants in a different color than the word pattern.

3. Show the student the word family. Read the word family to the student, or ask the student to read it if it is a word family the student already recognizes (such as *-at* or *-it*).
4. Show the student the first consonant sound she will recognize. Ask the student to say the sound the consonant makes.
5. Place the sound in front of the word family. Explain that you would like the student to read the new word by blending the beginning sound with the sound of the word family. Model the first one for the student. In the example below you would say /m/ /at/ /mat/.



6. Model more if the student continues to need help. When the student is ready, give the student the stack of cards with initial sounds she knows and have her form new words.
7. After a student is able to create words independently, you may introduce 1-2 new initial sounds from the remaining cards.

### Concentration Game

This game provides practice in both sounding out words using patterns and recognizing patterns in print.

#### Steps

1. Create pairs of words that share a word pattern, and write each word on a separate index card. Examples: *cat/mat*, *had/mad*, *love/glove*.
2. Determine how many pairs you will use for the board. Eight pairs make a good-sized board.
3. Turn the cards face down and shuffle them. Put them into a grid—for 16 cards the grid would be 4 x 4.
4. The first player turns over two cards. If they do not use the same word pattern, the player turns them back over and it is the second player's turn.
5. If they use the same word pattern, the player must read each word correctly to pick up the cards. It is then the second player's turn.
6. The second player turns over two cards. If they do not use the same word pattern, the player turns them back over and it is the first player's turn. If they use the same pattern, the player must read each word correctly to pick up the cards. It is now the first player's turn again.
7. Play repeats until all of the cards have been picked up. The player with the most cards wins.

### Word Slides

Word slides are great hands-on learning tools for working with word patterns.

#### Steps

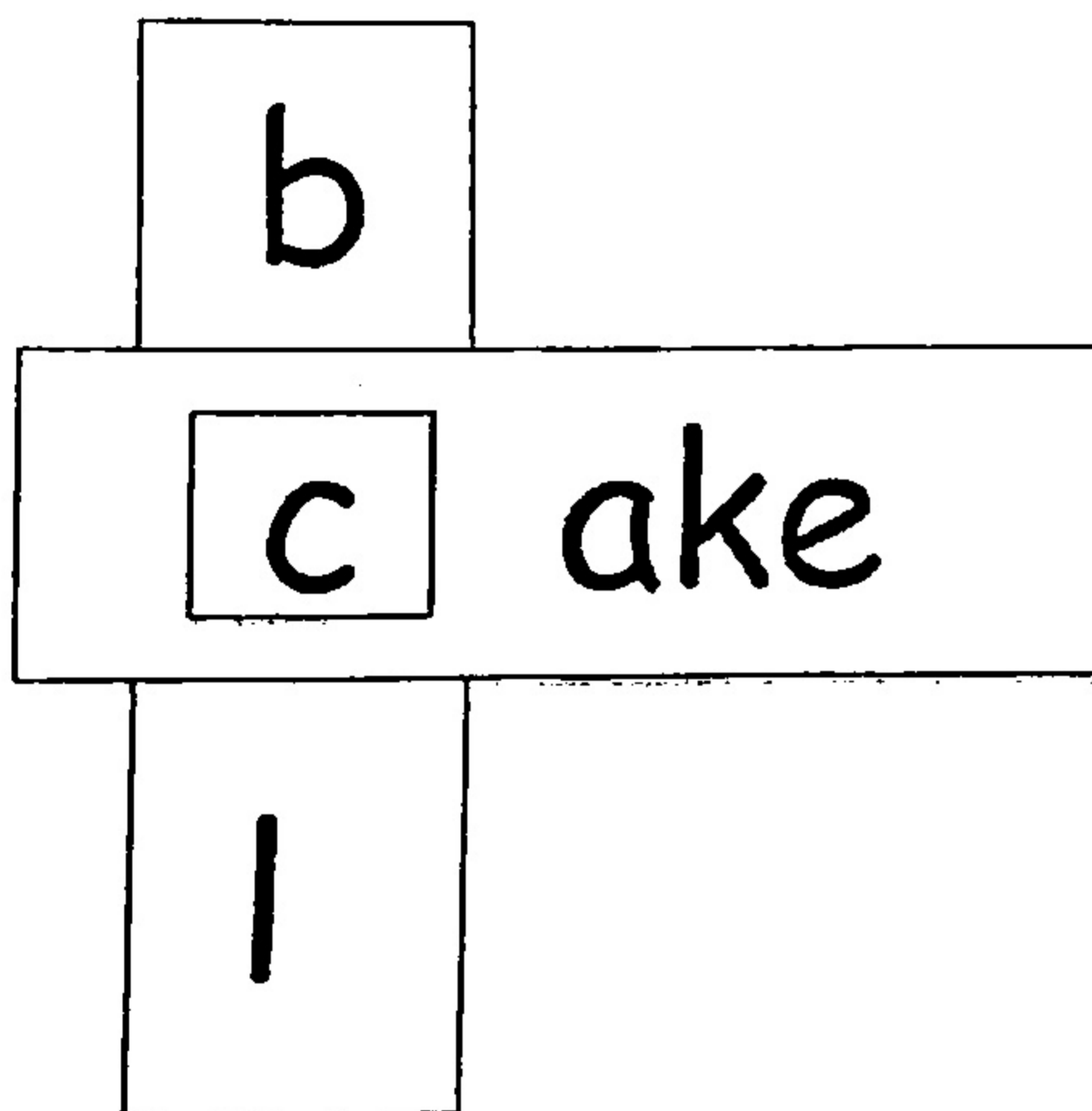
1. Select a word pattern or patterns to review.
2. Place students in pairs or small groups.
3. Give each set of students a word pattern. Have students brainstorm all of the words they can form using that word pattern.
4. Give each student two 4" x 6" index cards

5. Have students fold one index card in half lengthwise.
6. Have students print the word family on the right hand side of the card.
7. Have students cut a window for the missing initial sound, and then cut a slit in the fold of the index card.
8. Have students fold the second index card lengthwise.
9. Have students write the initial consonant sounds from the words they brainstormed onto the second index card.
10. Insert the second index card into the slot of the first index card.
11. As students pull the index card, the consonant sounds will appear in the window.  
Students can practice reading each word.

### Variations

1. Instead of cutting a window at the beginning of the word, you can cut a window in the middle of the word. Write the vowels on the pull strip and practice substituting them to create words.
2. Write one word pattern on the front of the strip and another on the back of the strip.

### Example



### Sight Word Flashcard Practice

Flashcards are one of the best and easiest ways to practice recognizing words by sight. And you may already have them—many other ESL practice activities involve writing words on flashcards, so they are often readily available for practice.

## Steps

1. Choose six to ten words the student wants to learn. They may already exist on flashcards. If not, have the student write each word on an index card.
2. Shuffle the stack of index cards. Flip the top one over and ask the student to read it. If the student reads it correctly, put it to the right.
3. If the student misses the word, put it to the left. If a student has trouble, read the word aloud and ask him or her to use it in a sentence. Put the card to the left.
4. Once a student has gone through the stack once, pick up the cards on the left that the student missed. Shuffle these cards and review them again following the same procedure. Continue this until the student reads all of the words correctly.
5. Shuffle the entire deck and review all the words again. Continue until the student is able to read the entire deck, or until you sense that the student is becoming frustrated.

## Variations

1. Once the student is able to read the entire stack correctly, focus on reading the word quickly and accurately. Using a stopwatch, begin timing as you flip over the first card. Work your way through the deck. Record the time and any misses. Repeat the process 2–3 more times, recording the time and number of misses. Discuss any improvement the data shows.

## Teaching Reading Vocabulary

Here are some strategies for teaching reading vocabulary. Some of them enhance the strategies you will use for teaching oral vocabulary.

**Teach print vocabulary when you teach oral vocabulary.** After student learn new oral vocabulary, introduce the same vocabulary words in print. Write the words on the board. Read the words, then have students read the words. Finally, have students write the words.

**Have students create vocabulary journals or flashcards.** Have students write new vocabulary words in vocabulary journals or on flashcards. For lower level students, have them write the word on one side of a flashcard and draw or paste a picture on the other side. As students become more fluent, have them write simple definitions in their own words and use the word in a sentence.

**Review vocabulary before reading.** The reading passage in your lesson should be connected to the topic, so it will likely contain some of the same words students learned in the vocabulary section of the lesson. Before reading, review these vocabulary words. Point to the words on the board or in a student's set of flashcards or journal. Ask the student to read the word. Next, point to the word in the passage and ask the student to read the word. Do this for other difficult words the student may not know, including a simple definition after reading the word. Reviewing vocabulary before reading will help with comprehension.

**Ensure multiple exposures.** Students will learn new words when they see the words often, in different contexts, and use them in speaking and writing. Choose reading passages

that reinforce important vocabulary words. Also design practice activities that allow students to use the words in writing and speech. This ensures that the words will become part of the students' vocabularies.

## Teaching Reading Fluency

Reading fluency is the speed and ease with which we read. It has three components:

- Speed
- Accuracy
- Expressiveness (technically, *prosody*)

The following techniques are good strategies for improving students' reading fluency.

## Echo Reading

Echo reading provides support to students because they hear fluent reading modeled before attempting to do it themselves.

### Steps

1. Select something to read that is short and at a level slightly higher than what the student can read independently.
2. Review vocabulary the student may not know.
3. Read the first sentence aloud, modeling proper pace and phrasing.
4. Ask the student to read the same sentence aloud after you.
5. Continue this pattern to the end of the passage.
6. When you've finished the passage, go back to the beginning and follow the same pattern again. As the student improves, expand the amount of text you read before the student "echoes" you. For instance, increase to two sentences and then to a paragraph.
7. Encourage the student to read independently as soon as he or she is comfortable.

### Variations

- To adapt this activity to a classroom environment, you might read through the passage once with the entire class echoing in unison, then go back through the passage using the same technique and calling on individual students to read. Remember to read the sentence aloud before each student reads to model proper pace and phrasing.
- Encourage students to use smart phones or other digital recorders to record you as you read so they can practice at home. Or, you can make a digital recording of yourself reading the passage and load it onto student phones.

## Modeled Reading

Modeled reading gives students an opportunity to hear reading done with good expression and good phrasing. It also provides a change of pace in instruction and allows students to practice listening skills.

## Steps

1. Choose fiction materials that are of interest to students. Since students are not reading aloud, the text may be a reading level above the students' instructional reading level.
2. Provide students with copies of the passage.
3. Ask the students to relax and listen to the reading as they follow along in the text.
4. Read aloud and model expressive and fluent reading for the students.
5. The reading need only be about 5 minutes in length.

## Variations

- The model does not have to be the teacher. It can be a recording or another student.

## Dyad/Choral Reading

Dyad reading involves a teacher and one student; choral reading is a teacher and a group of students. For both activities, the students and teacher read the same passage aloud together. Both provide an opportunity for students to read fluently and independently, knowing that support is available from the teacher or other classmates if needed.

## Steps

1. Begin by selecting something to read that is short and at an independent reading level for the students. As in echo reading, your role is to model proper pace, phrasing, and emphasis.
2. If the students are reading comfortably, you will simply stop and allow them to continue on their own.
3. If students encounter a word they do not know, provide it quickly so the pace is not disrupted.
4. If students start to struggle with the selection, begin reading again to provide a model.
5. Repeat the process until students are able to read the passage aloud independently, with proper pace and phrasing.

## Variations

- This is a good activity for students to practice at home with a recording of the passage.

## Guidelines for Fluency Instruction

There are two rules you should follow when doing reading fluency practice.

4. **Practice fluency after the students have read the passage and you've checked for comprehension.** At that point students have reviewed the vocabulary multiple times and are more familiar with the passage, having read it once already. This sets them up for success.
5. **Don't practice other things when practicing fluency.** Don't ask comprehension questions or ask a student to stop and decode a word. Reading fluently takes all of a student's concentration.



## Levels of Reading Comprehension

When checking to see if students understood what they just read, we want to probe at three different levels: literal, inferential, and critical thinking.

- **Literal comprehension** is the ability for readers to recognize and recall specific facts mentioned in a story: the name of the character, where he or she lived, or who the character visited. Check students' literal comprehension by asking them to summarize the story and by asking specific questions about the story where the answer is clearly stated in what they read. For beginning-level ESL students, this is the comprehension level to focus on.
- With **inferential comprehension**, information is not specifically given in the text. Readers combine textual clues with their own experience to make inferences about what happened. "How" and "Why" questions can help you check inferential comprehension. Students who are literate in their native languages will likely have some of the comprehension skills needed for this level and will be able to demonstrate this level of comprehension when their English language proficiency is high enough. Students who are not literate in a native language will need instruction in specific comprehension skills and strategies.
- **Readers who use critical thinking** understand what they read well enough to use it in other contexts. For instance, they might:
  - Apply: take what they learned by reading and apply it to a different situation
  - Analyze: explore the moods and motivations of a story's characters
  - Synthesize: develop an opinion based on information from several sources
  - Evaluate: compare and contrast elements in a text and make judgments

Again, students who are not literate in a native language will need instruction in these specific comprehension skills. This instruction isn't a focus until students have reached a low- to high-intermediate level. Students who are literate in their native languages may already have some of these comprehension skills, depending on their literacy proficiency or education level in the native language.

## Before, During, and After Approach to Comprehension

When working with ESL students, it helps to think of reading comprehension instruction in three stages:

- what we do to prepare students before they read
- what we do to support comprehension while students read
- what we do to check for comprehension after students after read

### Before Reading

Before reading, tutors can

- **review new vocabulary** that students will see in the text. Reviewing vocabulary before reading improves comprehension;

- **preview the story** by directing students to look at pictures, titles, headings, and subheadings, and to use them to make predictions about the story;
- ask questions that help students **access prior knowledge and experience** relevant to the story;
- help students **set a purpose for reading**. Ask questions that help them think about what they want to learn about the topic or a character in the story.

## During Reading

While students are reading, tutors can

- **provide reading support** by supplying words when students have trouble decoding them or even reading the story to the students first;
- encourage students to **read in small chunks, ask questions, and reread** things that didn't make sense.

## After Reading

After students have finished reading, tutors can

- **ask questions** about the story to check for comprehension
- ask students to **summarize** the story in their own words
- do a **writing activity** based on the story. This can be a cloze activity (fill in the blank) that summarizes a story; sentence completion based on information in an article; or a summary paragraph, depending on students' writing abilities.