

What do Successful Readers Do?

1. They activate and use their existing knowledge, either from previous study or from their personal experience, to make sense of new information. (They ask themselves, What do I already know about this topic, either from my experience or other material I've learned in school? How does what I know connect to what I'm learning from this text?)
2. They ask questions about the text before, during and after reading. (They ask themselves the kinds of questions teachers might ask-- both clarifying questions, to make sure they understand, and ponderable questions that extend their thinking.)
3. They draw inferences from the text (They ask, What can I figure out, even if the author doesn't come right out and say it directly? They do this whether reading literature or informational text.)
4. They monitor their own comprehension (They ask themselves, Do I understand what I'm reading? If not, where did I get lost?)
5. They use "fix-up" strategies when meaning breaks down (They know some strategies to use when they find their attention drifting or realize they don't understand what they just read. They expect reading to make sense, so they employ strategies to help themselves understand. They don't just give up or plow through.)
6. They determine what is important, separating main ideas from details. (When they take notes, they aren't highlighting everything or copying every word, but writing down only the key concepts, regardless of the note-taking format they choose. When they speak or write about the text, they focus on the important, not the trivial).
7. They synthesize information to create new thinking. (They take what they have read and use it to solve problems, to create something new, to understand the world better)
8. They create images in their heads to "illustrate" their reading. (Reading is not abstract, but concrete. They use images from their own experiences or from movies and TV to make the words on the page live. This is true even for instructions: they can visualize making the steps involved in the process.)

Adapted from:

Tovani, Cris. *I Read It, but I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse, 2000.

Six Signs that a Reader is Confused

Do these ever happen to you?

1. The voice inside the reader's head isn't interacting with the text. Readers have two types of voices in their head as they read. One is reciting the text. The other has a conversation with the text, in a sense talking back to the words on the page. Sometimes it asks questions. It can agree or disagree with the content. This voice interacts with the ideas on the page. When readers only hear themselves saying the words, they are confused or bored and won't remember what they have read.
2. The camera inside the reader's head shuts off. Good readers have a video camera playing inside their head as they read. When the camera shuts off and the reader can no longer get a visual image from the words, it is an indication that meaning has been interrupted.
3. The reader's mind begins to wander. Good readers catch themselves when they are thinking about something unrelated to the text. Thinking about something far removed from the material is a signal that readers must reconnect with their reading.
4. The reader can't remember what has been read. Good readers can usually retell some part of what they have read. If they can't remember anything at all, it is a signal they need to go back and repair meaning.
5. Clarifying questions asked by the reader are not answered. Good readers ask literal questions to clarify meaning. When these questions don't get answered, it is an indication that the reader needs more background knowledge or is not focused on the text.
6. The reader reencounters a character and has no recollection when that character was introduced. Good readers keep track of characters and know who they are. When a reader reencounters a character and has no recollection who that character is, it is a signal that the reader wasn't paying attention and needs to repair something that has caused meaning to break down.

Once you realize that you are lost, what do you do about it?

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What to do When You Are Confused

First step:



Then, try one or more of the following:

1. Make a connection between the text and your life, your knowledge of the world, or another text. In history, think back to a class lecture, video or other section of the textbook, even something you learned last year.
2. Make a prediction. Based on what you have already read, predict what the next section will be about. If you are lost, go back to where you weren't lost and predict something about the section you are trying to read.
3. Stop and think about what you have already read. The most useful fix-up strategy of all! Look back at what you already read and attempt to summarize it. If you can't, go back to the point where you were not confused and summarize that section, then re-read.
4. Ask yourself a question and attempt to answer it. Good readers always ask themselves questions, and then continue reading to find the answers. Clarifying questions ask *who*, *what* *when* and *where*. Pondering questions ask *how* and *why*. Not all the answers are in the text. Some come from your own background knowledge.
5. Write about what you have read. Sometimes just jotting down a few notes will clarify meaning.
6. Visualize. Use images from movies, TV or your own life to help you picture what is going on in the text.
7. Use print and text conventions. Key words, bold print, italicized print, punctuation, even sentence and paragraph structure can all give clues to what the author thinks is important.
8. Reread. You don't have to reread the whole text. Just go back to the last place in the text you understood, and reread from there.
9. Adjust your speed: slow down or speed up. A textbook is not a magazine. If you are confused, it may be that you are reading too quickly.

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