



# Different Reading Strategies: Learning to Engage in Internal Conversations

## Overview

**Rationale for Change Idea:** Expert readers monitor their comprehension—is the text making sense?—and they may have a conversation with themselves about how to continue reading or automatically try different strategies. Students, especially those who find reading challenging, need to (a) learn about different reading strategies, (b) understand that trying different strategies is normal, and (c) be reminded of the strategies that are available for them to try.<sup>1</sup>

*See also the “checking comprehension” change idea.*

## Connection to Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Goals and Priorities

Understandings and Expectations			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>1: Planning standards-aligned content</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>4: Evidence of student learning</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>2: Equitable instruction</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>5: Collective efficacy</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>3: Student engagement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>6: Equitable and inclusive learning environment</b>

English Language Arts Instructional Practices			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Understanding the text</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Critiquing the text</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Responding to the text</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Producing text</b>

*Note.* There are multiple ways to implement the change idea on different reading strategies. The ideas below for teacher preparation and implementation are just one way of thinking about this work.

<sup>1</sup> See Vaughn et al (2022) WWCPG, Recommendation 3: *Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.*

Attention to Equity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on one’s own biases to mitigate negative impact on curriculum selection, instruction, and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. (U6)*	<input type="checkbox"/> Emphasize assets, resilience, joy, and resistance of historically marginalized groups to provide a more comprehensive representation of their lived experiences. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/> Use culturally relevant and sustaining approaches across grade levels and content areas for all students, with a critical eye toward serving those from historically marginalized groups. (U1, U2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustain students’ cultural, linguistic, and literate practices while providing instruction that promotes flexibility in their ability to navigate different cultures and contexts. (U1, U2, U3, U6)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Position students for success as knowledge producers rather than consumers. (U1, U2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Use perspective-taking to develop an understanding of the factors that influence varied points of view. (U2, U3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Draw on students’ interests and culture to shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (U1, U6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Question the single story/status quo that sustains societal inequities. (U2)
<input type="checkbox"/> Use language to discuss asset-based approaches to teaching and learning. (U6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Center the experiences, voices, histories, perspectives, and dignity of Native People and People of Color. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster a nurturing and collaborative learning community where students seek feedback from teachers and peers, assess their own learning, and set goals. (U3, U4)	

\*LBUSD Understandings Continuum

**Who Benefits:** All students

**When Used and Why?**

- After teachers have modeled strategies for reading in their content area, students use during every reading activity to help them understand what they are reading

**Checking Comprehension in Social Studies and Language Arts**

- Content area reading assignments for middle school students often require deeper levels of comprehension than students have had to use in earlier grades.
- Materials—even in content areas—that students have had to read prior to middle school may not have presented challenges that require critical reading.
- Such materials may include textual features, rhetorical features, and graphic features such as maps and charts that students have not learned to comprehend.

- Social studies and language arts teachers do not have to teach reading fundamentals; but if students are to do well in these subjects, teachers may have to support their acquisition of more sophisticated critical reading and thinking skills.
- For all readers, being aware of one's comprehension is the foundation of these necessary skills.

**Time Required:**

- 5 minutes or so to introduce
  - Periodically remind students to check their comprehension and try different strategies as they complete reading assignments.
- The practice should add very little time to students' actual reading, and there are distinct advantages to slowing down their process to be sure they are comprehending.

## Encouraging Students To Use Different Reading Strategies

### Learning to Engage in Internal Conversations

**Rationale for Change Idea:** Expert readers monitor their comprehension—is the text making sense?—and they may switch strategies automatically or have a conversation about how to continue reading. Students, especially those who find reading challenging, need to (a) learn about different reading strategies, (b) understand that trying different strategies is normal, and (c) be reminded of the strategies that are available for them to try.<sup>2</sup>

### When Used and Why?

- After teachers have modeled strategies for reading in the content area.

**Who Benefits:** All students

**Time Required:** 5 minutes or so to introduce; then periodically reminding students about the diversity of strategies should takes less than a minute.

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<sup>2</sup> See Vaughn et al (2022) WWCPG, Recommendation # 3: *Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.*

## Guidelines for Coaches: Introducing the “Different Comprehension Strategies” Change Idea

### Why the Change Idea Is Important: Explaining the Change Idea to Teachers

- Introduce the “different comprehension strategies” change idea to teachers as one of the ways for them to help their students become more expert at the **content area reading** that most likely were not taught in earlier grades.
  - Emphasize that this is not the same as teaching reading fundamentals and that if students are still having difficulty decoding, they may need services from a reading specialist.
- Brainstorm with teachers the skills and strategies that their content area requires, for example:
  - Identifying facts, key figures, timelines, etc. in social studies
  - Reading graphic materials such as maps and charts
  - Reading “between the lines” to determine author’s perspectives and biases
  - Identifying rhetorical devices and understanding and critiquing their use
- In addition to learning facts, one of their goals for teaching in their content area should be to help students become better critical readers in these specific areas.
  - Remind teachers that **reading instruction** in elementary school may not have attended to the critical reading skills students need in the content areas.
  - Teachers in earlier grades may have primarily emphasized the skills and strategies to develop literal levels of comprehension, not to evaluate or critique what one reads.<sup>3</sup>
  - Also remind them that the **reading materials** in elementary school most likely were not focused on content area learning.
- Engage with teachers in a discussion about the following realities:
  - Many middle school students may not question the extent to which they are understanding what they read and assume that their lack of comprehension is because the reading material is too hard.
  - Some students may read so quickly that they do not check their comprehension and complete assignments without fully understanding what they have read.
  - Other students read very slowly and miss the thread of what they are trying to read.

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<sup>3</sup> If teachers question this, remind them that students in Grades 4 and 8 historically do well on the “basic” questions on the National Assessment of Education Progress but do less well on higher level questions that require critical thinking.

- Still other readers have convinced themselves that they are bad readers and that “reading is not for them.”
- Remind teachers that part of their responsibility as content area teachers is to help students master the specific cognitive “tools” to make sense in their content area; these tools include reading and writing.

## Preparing for Implementing the Change Idea With Students

### Teacher Preparation to Introduce the “Different Reading Strategies” Change Idea

- Think about your own reading processes and those that previous students have used, especially when reading challenging texts.
- Be prepared to name and describe specific strategies that lead to critical thinking, deeper levels of reading, and engagement with texts.

### Introducing the Change Idea to Students

- **Teachers explain that it is common for readers to use different strategies when they read.**
  - Switching from one strategy to another may be a **unconscious decision** because readers recognize that they are not comprehending or the switch may be a **conscious decision**, with readers acknowledging that they are not comprehending and determining to try another strategy for understanding the challenging text.
  - Essentially, **readers engage in a conversation with themselves** about what they read, determine whether they are fully comprehending, and then diversify their strategies if needed to ensure understanding.
- Using a piece of content area text, teachers model their reading process by externalizing their strategy use as students follow along.
  - Some strategies may be relatively straightforward, and some may be more nuanced.
    - **Predicting** what will happen or what will be presented/explained
    - **Visualizing**, that is, making mental pictures
    - **Questioning themselves** (“does this make sense?”) or **the author** (“why does she write this?”)
    - **Making connections** (to other reading or personal experiences)
    - **Identifying specific parts** of text that cause problems
      - » Identifying parts of the text that are especially interesting or that relate to other interests or topics being studied

- **Using “fix-up” strategies** such as rereading, figuring out word meanings, asking questions
- **Summarizing and checking** for understanding
  - » Keep track of what strategies that work (or do not) and how having reading challenges makes you feel.

### Sample Teacher Implementation Routine

1. **Introduce the “different reading strategies” change idea** as a way for students to learn to be more active readers, especially when reading texts that they find challenging.
2. Explain to students that even expert readers often encounter reading challenges, but part of what makes them experts is that they
  - a. monitor their comprehension as they read (“Is this making sense to me?”) and
  - b. when the answer to this question is “no,” draw from a set of strategies they have found to be dependable to help them better comprehend what they are reading.
3. Brainstorm questions that students can ask themselves:
  - a. Is this making sense to me?
  - b. If not, would it help to reread the section?
  - c. Am I reading too quickly or too slowly?
  - d. Are there specific words or ideas that I do not understand and need to check?
  - e. Besides rereading or checking vocabulary, what else can I do to make sense of this?
4. Model the strategy with students by giving them (or projecting) a difficult but content-relevant passage that teachers have prepared to read through orally.
  - a. Stop periodically and discuss whether students are comprehending and what might be causing them difficulty.
  - b. Ask them to describe difficulties (e.g., rhetorical devices or new vocabulary) and possible strategies to address those difficulties.
5. After modeling the process, generate and **post a list of reading strategies** that students should attempt to master to help them understand what they read.
  - a. Rereading but doing so more slowly
  - b. Subvocalizing or “whisper reading”
  - c. Checking meaning of unfamiliar words, looking at context, or applying morphemic analysis
  - d. Identifying **specific facts or ideas** that seem confusing and attempting to figure them out, perhaps by looking things up

- e. Determining whether the comprehension challenges are from a lack of understanding of the **entire passage**, in which case, readers may need to reread the entire text or even to reread previous assignments, check annotations from previous readings, or ask for help
  - f. Checking to see whether there are any learning aids in the book one is using
  - g. Making notes (annotations) of areas of text that are confusing, with the intention of asking for help or otherwise seeking information
6. After modeling and discussing the change idea, present students with a reading assignment that most should be able to handle and ask them to make a conscious effort to notice the strategies they use as they read.
- a. Discuss the content and the strategies with students.
  - b. Encourage them to become more conscious—and often slower—readers, with the goal of increasing their overall comprehension.
  - c. Emphasize (ideally before each reading assignment) that using different reading strategies can improve their comprehension and their overall learning.

### **Teacher Preparation**

1. Use available data to determine which reading strategies students use proficiently and which strategies they are not likely to use or use less often.
2. Find appropriate selections of texts from the unit that are complex enough that students need to slow down to do a closer read of the text and/or that they need to gather information from the text to do further work.
3. Read through the text and determine an explicit purpose for reading connected to unit and lesson goals that will guide the strategy work that students will do. Identify which strategies may be used more than others during this reading.
4. Anticipate possible barriers and misconceptions that readers might have within the text and consider how being metacognitive about reading strategies will support them in making meaning. Identify where readers will need to slow down and be more metacognitive about their process.
5. Consider the level of scaffolding required for students using a variety of reading strategies. This may include the following:
  - a. High support – Modeling and gradually incorporating specific reading strategies that students do not seem to use on a regular basis. Or modeling and using multiple strategies across a text.
  - b. Medium-level support – Identifying spots in the text that would be helpful to stop and use reading strategies. Or having students pause their independent work to turn and

talk with a partner to share what strategies they used and how it helped them make meaning of the text.

- c. Low support – Provide a purpose/prompt for reading the text and reminding students of the reading strategies. Or after students read independently, have them share either with a partner, a small group, or the whole class what strategies they used, where in the text they used them, and how it helped them make meaning.
6. Decide how you will introduce the text and task along with the purpose of reading this particular text.

### **Possible Implementation Routine**

1. Introduce the text, task, and purpose for the reading.
  - a. Remind students (refer to chart/rubric) of the reading strategies that have been taught previously or share a resource/chart on the reading strategies being introduced or used in this lesson.
  - b. Celebrate recent student successes with using reading strategies (i.e., identifying the strategies they use as they read, higher levels of comprehension, better completion of tasks related to text).
  - c. Students should think about the purpose of reading and what kinds of they might use during the reading.
2. Teacher provides the appropriate level of support (see above) based on the complexity of the text/content and task and the students' ability to identify and use the reading strategies to make meaning.
3. When students have completed the reading of assigned text, have students share on the basis of the required level of support:
  - a. High and medium-level support – Have various partnerships share where they stopped, what strategies they read, and how it helped them understand the text.
  - b. Mid and low support – Ask text- or content-specific questions that require the students to show their comprehension of the text. As a follow-up, you can ask which strategies they used to make meaning of the text.
4. Repeat this process with specific, individual reading strategies or trying on multiple reading strategies with a complex text.



## Assessing the Change Idea

**Students' comprehension should improve** because they are monitoring their understanding and actively applying different strategies to make sense of what they are reading. Knowing that they have different strategies to try when their reading falters should give students more confidence, which can lead to their being more able—and willing—to talk about their reading processes, the challenges they encountered in their text material, and their strategies for overcoming reading. They should also be more willing to discuss the content of what they have read and to write about it.

Ideally, students will begin to perceive themselves as better, more capable readers. They may still not like to read, but they will likely feel more confident in their abilities in all content areas.

- **Teacher self-assessment/discussion questions:** Reflect on how well the students understood the **concept** that when a text is not making sense, readers should try different reading strategies to see if comprehension improves. Reflect on whether students actually begin to adopt this way of reading their content area material.
  - Do students recognize the value of using different strategies as a way of increasing their comprehension?
  - Do students say that they apply different strategies as they read?
  - Are students who recognize that they can apply different reading strategies able to talk at a high level about what they have read, that is, does their discussion show that they have understood what they have read?
  - Do students who use different reading strategies routinely seem better able to understand **what the class was learning about**?
    - What proportion of the class seems to understand?
- After introducing and discussing the change idea, how many students overall seem to be more confident reading difficult texts because they know that it is common to find texts difficult, especially on the first reading.
  - And now they have different strategies to try if they perceive themselves not to be understanding?
- What incorrect ideas, if any, do students have about reading (e.g., good readers always understand what they read the first time through, there is only one best reading strategy – reading straight through and doing so quickly)?
  - How might you dispel those incorrect ideas?
- What objections, if any, did students seem to have about using the change idea?
  - How might you address these objections?

- What seemed to work well in the way the comprehension monitoring and fix-up process was introduced, modeled, and structured for students?

It would be helpful to log some responses to these reflection questions in your implementation tracker. (These questions can be discussion points during coaching in addition to the general implementation questions in the coaches' handbook)

Rubric for Teacher Evaluation of Student Work			
4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Adequate	1 – Not satisfactory
Student is able to identify and use multiple reading comprehension strategies to make meaning of a complex text.	Student is able to identify and use 3 or more reading strategies to make meaning of a complex text.	Student is able to identify and use 1 or 2 reading strategies to make meaning of a complex text.	Student cannot identify or use different reading strategies to make meaning of a complex text.
Student is able to fully comprehend the text and consistently refers to the text in talking and writing.	Student is able to generally comprehend the text and often refers to the text in talking and writing.	Student is able to comprehend parts of the text and sometimes refers to the text in talking and writing.	Student is not able to comprehend the text and rarely refers to the text in talking and writing.

### Optional Discussion Rubric for Teacher Evaluation Implementation

Possible Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
Students who seemed to understand and to actively use multiple reading strategies understood <b>what the class was learning about</b> today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who know how to use multiple reading strategies can talk and write accurately about what they read.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
If applicable, students seem to refer to the posted list of strategies and talk in terms of the strategies they use (e.g., “I inferred what the author mean...”).	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students seemed to be using the critical reading skills that have been modeled for them.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
If students hadn’t understood the text they read today at first, they seemed to have different strategies to try without prompting.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

Students who seemed to understand the change idea and use different strategies seemed to feel comfortable sharing their thinking today in class (e.g., offered ideas, disagreed with each other, elaborated on each other's comments).	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who understand the different reading strategies took part in <b>classroom discussion</b> .	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who understand the different reading strategies had little difficulty completing <b>today's writing assignment</b> about what they have been reading and discussing.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

a To the extent possible, estimate the percentage of students who fall into the “< 50%” category and note those who may need extra help or reteaching.

Optional Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation in Social Studies and Language Arts			
Student statement	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
I understood what we were learning about today.	Yes	No	Sort of
I am aware of the different reading strategies I could use to help me understand the text we were reading today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Applying different reading-strategies helped me prepare for our class discussion or writing assignment.	Yes	No	Sort of
When I didn't understand the text we read today, I knew what I could do to figure it out (either on my own or with help).	Yes	No	Sort of
In general, when I don't understand a text, I know what I can do to figure it out (either on my own or with help).	Yes	No	Sort of

<sup>a</sup> Select “sort of” to indicate “to some extent” or “somewhat but not as much as I'd like or need to.”

