

What is reading?

Reading (like writing) is an interactive, constructive process

Reading is not just decoding the meaning of words, or sentences. It requires integrating the meanings of words, sentences, and paragraphs to construct a global meaning. The reader makes **inferences** in order to do this, which is like “filling in the blanks” or “reading between the lines.” Inferences are made through interaction between parts of the text (such as referring to something previously stated), and between the text and the reader’s prior knowledge.

Comprehension depends on the text and the reader

Text properties which influence comprehension include text structure and text cohesiveness. Texts written in a compare-contrast or problem-response format tend to be easier to comprehend than descriptive or chronological texts. It is also helpful when texts explicitly name any misconceptions the reader may have. Texts with higher cohesion require less inference making on the part of the reader, as more clues for understanding is given by the text itself. There are three types of cohesion: global, local, and explanatory.

Global cohesion refers to the connectivity and flow between paragraphs, or of the text as a whole. This can be achieved through introductory paragraphs and subheadings. **Local cohesion** refers to the relationships between clauses and sentences, and can be achieved through repetition of words or connectives such as *however*, *therefore*, and *because*; or explanations for terms and concepts used. **Explanatory cohesion** refers to the amount of background info provided by the text rather than left out for the reader to look up or already know prior to reading.

Reader properties which influence comprehension include:

- Reader goals
- Knowledge deficits and misconceptions
- Prior knowledge (Domain knowledge)
- Reading strategies

Reader goals allow readers to narrow their focus when reading. For example, deeper comprehension is achieved if there is a goal to learn as opposed to reading for entertainment or no direction at all.

Misconceptions, more so than **knowledge deficits**, can interfere with accurate understanding of material. **Prior knowledge** includes all knowledge a reader brings, such as vocabulary and grammar, while **domain knowledge** is specific to the discipline. **Reading strategies** are the ways readers create inferences. Even with a lot of domain knowledge, reading strategies are necessary for applying knowledge to new context. They can also help fill in gaps due to a lack of domain knowledge. (Examples of reading strategies are included on the back)

Reading experiences also vary due to the reader’s cultural filters, which can be a strength in building metadiscursive awareness

Readers can improve their understanding through creating a congruent “**third space**” between their own knowledge and that imparted by the text. This can be understood as the reader interacting with a text in a way that mutually informs both perspectives, so that new knowledge is created as a result. This is helpful for texts that can seem unfamiliar or even contradictory to the reader’s own perspective. Creating this “third space” allows for the reader to consider the context where knowledge is produced, in what instances certain perspectives are useful, and the power structures involved in knowledge creation. This skill is known as **metadiscursive awareness**.

Reading strategies

- Set **goals/intentions** for what to read for before reading. Readers remember different details depending on what they are looking for.
 - Professors often organize units by themes. Look back at the syllabus to help frame the reading.
 - Possible **questions** to ask:
 - What is the author's purpose?
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - What is the genre/discipline?
 - What is the tone of the piece?
 - What types of evidence is used? Is it effective?
 - How does the author organize the piece?
 - How are transitions made?
- **Reflect** on what exactly is challenging in the reading. Is it a lack of expected prior knowledge? Unfamiliarity with vocabulary or conventions of the genre/discipline? **Self-awareness** is the first step to solving the problem.
- **Paraphrasing** helps to externalize your own understanding, allowing for concrete self-evaluation of comprehension.
- **Connect** the text content to your own prior knowledge, or refer back to previously mentioned information in the text itself.
- **Reading like a writer**: Analyze the writer's choices (structure, organization, word choice, evidence, etc.) by considering your response as a reader, and how you might make the same or different choices in your own writing.
 - ∅ Use class readings as models of how to create understanding through writing (or lack thereof).
- Temporarily **adopt** someone else's argument to understand their perspective.
- ∅ Identify the **rhetorical structure** of the text. In other words, how does the structure enable communication of the argument?
- ∅ **Scenarios**: For anything especially confusing, it can be worthwhile to make and test hypotheses about the underlying intentions of the author. As you read, look for clues that support or refute your hypothesis.
- ∅ If there are **figures**, read them first.
- ∅ Read the **subheadings** and the **beginnings** and **ends** of each section.
- ∅ **Annotate**: Highlight/underline key sentences/phrases in the text, and write notes in the margin. These can point to the author's argument, questions you have, or anything that sparks a thought.
 - **Interact** with the text. Your opinions and feelings matter!
- **Modeling**: Hear someone else's thought process (the possible ideas they have, the questions they ask themselves, etc.) as they attempt to comprehend a text.

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