WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY
Mission Possible: Preflight Preparation
Prereading Strategies
(purpose setting, previewing,
activating prior knowledge, & predicting)

Purpose Setting

Setting a purpose for reading is critical in the comprehension process. It helps readers focus their attention while reading and guides them in selecting what they want to remember after reading. As readers process text, their purposes for reading determine what they will recall, influence their interpretation of text, and provide them with a plan for reading and sense of security as to where they are going. When readers have a clear purpose, it can help them activate relevant background knowledge in order to make more accurate predictions about the text.

Researchers found that when readers read for school purposes, (e.g. had a study goal) they were more likely to read more slowly, engage in rereading, and evaluate the text. They often stopped to explain what they had read before continuing to the next element, and worked hard to understand and remember what they read. Readers who read for enjoyment (e.g. had an entertainment goal) were more likely to find connections among ideas and events in the text, predicted upcoming events in the story, made up to nine times more inferences when reading stories when compared to reading expository texts, and were more likely to analyze the author's writing style.

Previewing

Readers use previewing strategies to sample aspects of the text. These cues can be drawn from any feature of text (title, pictures, headings, or the text itself) and the way the author organized the text (text structure). These cues help readers activate and connect to relevant background knowledge. These same cues, when combined with activated background knowledge, allow readers to make predictions about what might happen in the text.

Activating Prior Knowledge

Readers who know a lot about the topic of a text before reading it are more likely to comprehend the text better than readers who know little about the topic. For example, knowing a lot about French history helps you to understand historical texts about France. When readers read about a wide variety of topics, they build their storehouse of knowledge from which to draw on and connect to when reading. This knowledge base includes general world knowledge, specific knowledge related to the content of text, and the way text is organized.

When readers think about what they know, it helps them to pay attention to important parts of the text they are reading. Readers are more able to infer and elaborate on what they are reading allowing them to fill in missing or incomplete information. They are better able to develop a sophisticated understanding of the text.

It is not enough, however, to just have a rich knowledge base. It is also important for readers to be able to tap *relevant* prior knowledge when reading. When inappropriate prior knowledge is accessed, the reader's thinking can go off on irrelevant tangents, as can happen when a reader dwells on a single word or isolated phrase. For example, thinking about a busy subway train station will not help readers comprehend the important themes, or big ideas of persistence and positive thinking when reading *The Little Engine that Could*. Rather, it is often more helpful for readers to focus on the big ideas in the text.

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Readers also tend to ignore new information when they read if it conflicts with their previous knowledge. Therefore, it is helpful for readers to discuss what they read with others. During book discussions, peers hold readers accountable for their interpretations and help them develop understanding of the text.

Predicting

Good readers are able to generate predictions on their own and monitor those predictions for accuracy as they read. They make predictions using three types of cues from the text: the content (a combination of background knowledge of the topic and the text itself), the way in which the text is organized (text structure) and the features of the text (title, pictures, headings, etc.).

Readers make predictions using any type of text and do so continually while reading. Predicting helps readers focus their attention while reading and gives them a purpose for reading because readers are motivated to continue reading to determine whether their prediction is accurate. Readers verify, reject, or alter their predictions as a result of new information as it is read.

Putting it All Together

These prereading strategies (purpose setting, previewing, activating prior knowledge, and predicting) are a family of strategies that readers use flexibly and in combination with one another. The entire process is repeated over and over and may occur in any order as readers sample text (preview), make connections to known information (activate prior knowledge), predict what will be read (make predictions), and determine reasons to find out more (sets purpose). At any given point a reader may have multiple predictions and purposes for reading.

References:

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