

# CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

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Wikipedia defines the term *Reading Comprehension* as 'the ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning.' In addition to being able to read the words on a page or screen, it is crucial that students understand what they are reading. This is particularly important since the primary reason for reading text, is to gain meaning from it.

Throughout my teaching career, I have dealt with the misconception that if a child can read the words on a page, then they have understood what they are reading. This is not necessarily the case as Reading is a complex skill to acquire! When a child reads a text that is too hard for them, they often become so busy focussing on decoding the words that they end up with little understanding of what they are actually reading. Furthermore, a child may not fully understand the underlying meaning of a text, if they are reading books written for an older age group. As a child progresses in Reading, the texts become more complex as they are generally written for a greater level of life experience and maturity. If a child is reading texts that are too advanced, it can result in them not fully understanding the deeper meaning of the text.

At the beginning of each year, I have a conversation with my students about the value of being able to comprehend what we read. We discuss the importance of comprehension and how we are wasting our time reading a text, if we do not understand it. This conversation leads into one of the first Reading Strategies that I teach my students, which is called *Check for Understanding*. I model how to use this strategy by reading a page or two of a book and then pausing to ask myself the questions: 'Who am I reading about?' and 'What just happened?' I use the *Think Aloud* technique to ask and answer these questions, so that the students can hear my thought processes.

When introducing the *Check for Understanding* strategy, I ensure that I model two distinctly different types of *Think Alouds*: answering the questions correctly, as well as being unable to answer them. This demonstrates to the students the approach that should be taken in either situation. When I model being able to correctly answer the questions, my *Think Aloud* sounds something like: 'I was able to answer those questions correctly. This means that I can comprehend the text so I can keep on reading.' I then continue to read another page or two of the text, before stopping again to repeat the questioning process. However, when I model being unable to answer the questions, it leads me into teaching the students about another Reading Strategy called *Back Up and Reread*.

*Back Up and Reread* can be used in conjunction with a couple of different Reading Strategies, as well as being a strategy in its own right. It can be used with *Check for Understanding* when the reader is unable to answer the questions: 'Who am I reading about?' and 'What just happened?' My *Think Aloud* would be something like, 'I was unable to answer those questions correctly, so I should back up and reread the text again more slowly.' I would model doing this and then *Check for Understanding* again, by asking myself: 'Who am I reading about?' and 'What just happened?' If the book is at a suitable level for the reader's ability, then using the *Back Up and Reread* strategy can assist students with their comprehension.

Just as being able to decode and read the words on a page is a pivotal part of the Reading process, ensuring that a child understands what they are reading is also essential. It is through their understanding, that children are able to gain enjoyment, stimulate their imaginations and learn new information. *Check for Understanding* is an easy to use Reading Strategy that can assist students to self-assess whether or not they are able to comprehend what they read.

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Wikipedia 2017, *Reading Comprehension*, Available from: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading\\_comprehension](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading_comprehension)>. [27 August 2017].

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