



## Teaching Adults to Read: Comprehension

**New Directions:  
New Opportunities  
2010 MAETC  
May 5, 2010**

## Introductions

- ❖ Introduce yourself by name, role, and program.
- ❖ Briefly talk about the types of students you instruct.



## Agenda

- ❖ Overview
- ❖ Research Related to Comprehension
- ❖ Assessment in Comprehension
- ❖ Strategy Instruction in Comprehension
- ❖ Next Steps and Closing

## Objectives

- ❖ Name the findings and explain the implications of reading research for comprehension
- ❖ Use tools for assessing reading skills in comprehension
- ❖ Demonstrate effective strategies for teaching comprehension

## What Is Reading?

Reading is more...  
than comprehension.



## The Components of Reading

Print-Based Components

**Alphabetic:**  
Phonemic Awareness

**Word Analysis**  
(decoding,  
word recognition,  
structural analysis)

**Fluency**

Meaning-Based Components

**Vocabulary**

**Comprehension**

**Skilled  
Reading**

Fluent execution and  
coordination of word  
recognition and text  
comprehension.

## Reading Components

- ❖ **Alphabetic**s: The use of letters in an alphabet to represent spoken words
  - **Phonemic Awareness**: Knowledge of speech sounds
  - **Word Analysis (Phonics plus)**: Letter-sound knowledge
- ❖ **Fluency**: Ability to read with speed, accuracy, ease, phrasing and expression
- ❖ **Vocabulary**: Knowledge of word meanings
- ❖ **Comprehension**: Understanding a text, or *constructing meaning*



## National Institute for Literacy Publications

- ❖ *What is Scientifically Based Research? A Guide for Teachers* (2002)
- ❖ *Using Research and Reason in Education* (2005)
- ❖ *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* (2002)
- ❖ *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers* (2005)
- ❖ *Teaching Adults to Read: A Summary of Scientifically Based Research Principles* (2005)
- ❖ *What Content Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (2007)
- ❖ *Learning To Achieve: A Review of the Research Literature on Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities* (2009)

[www.nifl.gov/publications/publications.html](http://www.nifl.gov/publications/publications.html)



## What Is Reading?

### Activity

- ❖ Spend 2 to 3 minutes working individually to define the term *reading*.

## What Is Reading?

Reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:

- The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print
- The ability to decode unfamiliar words
- The ability to read fluently
- Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension
- The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print
- The development and maintenance of a motivation to read

## Comprehension

### What is it?

Reading comprehension has been defined as “the process of simultaneously **extracting** and **constructing** meaning through **interaction** and **involvement** with written language.”

Snow, C. (2002). *Reading for Understanding: Toward an R & D Program in Reading Comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Education, p. 11.



## Comprehension

### Why is comprehension-strategy instruction important?

- Many readers don't know they're not *getting it* or just pretend to understand.
- Less literate adults don't always *demand that it makes sense*.
- Many struggling readers are unaware of the kind of active processing good readers do.
- Struggling readers might not know what they're missing or notice inconsistencies.
- Struggling readers don't know what's causing the *comprehension breakdowns*.



## Comprehension

### What causes comprehension breakdowns?

- Limited vocabulary and/or background knowledge
- Weak decoding skills and slow word identification
- Limited use of strategies

### Who needs strategy instruction?

- Most (maybe all) learners in adult basic education and family literacy classrooms

## Findings: Comprehension Instruction

### Research

- Adult reading instruction can lead to improved reading comprehension but specific instructional practices are only beginning to be identified.
- One principle suggests that effective approaches provide direct as opposed to incidental instruction in comprehension strategies.
- A trend suggests focusing on more than one component or aspect of reading during instruction.
- Several trends suggest that enabling settings or approaches are effective.

## Findings: Comprehension

### **K–12 results provide support**

- Multi-components: Teaching alphabetics, fluency, and vocabulary all lead to improved reading comprehension.
- Direct instruction in specific strategies
- Most support for multiple-strategy instruction

## Standardized Assessments

- ❖ Assessments are available in written and oral forms.
- ❖ Most standardized tests are written tests of silent reading comprehension, mostly multiple choice.
- ❖ Curriculum-based tests are usually multiple choice or short answer.
- ❖ Informal reading inventories include oral comprehension assessments.

## Alternative Assessments

- ❖ May allow learners to demonstrate comprehension in other ways.
- ❖ May allow glimpse of other aspects of reading outcomes.
- ❖ Tutoring/classroom activities provide opportunities for informal assessment.

## Questions to Ask

### What's behind the comprehension problem?

#### Print skills?

- Word-reading difficulty?
- Limited decoding skills?
- Slow/inaccurate word identification (fluency)?
- Lack of phrasing or expression (fluency)?

## Questions to Ask

### What's behind the comprehension problem?

#### Meaning skills?

- Limited vocabulary?
- Limited background knowledge?
- Few comprehension strategies?

**Or both:** Limited print and meaning skills?



19

## Sample Adult Education Student: Ed

- ❖ 33 years old, single, born in Trinidad
- ❖ Second time in adult education program
- ❖ Low socioeconomic status
- ❖ Unemployed auto mechanic
- ❖ Wants a GED to get a good job
- ❖ Comprehension score: GE 6



20

## Sample Adult Education Student: Ruth

- ❖ 31-year-old native English speaker who was born and attended school through the 9th grade in Tennessee
- ❖ Has a GED but poor reading and math skills
- ❖ Diagnosed with a learning disability
- ❖ Comprehension score: GE 6



21

## Ed's and Ruth's Reading Profiles

	Ed	Ruth
Reading Comprehension	6	6
Word Analysis	2.6	7.5
Word Recognition	5	7
Spelling	1	7
Oral Reading	5	10
Oral Vocabulary	8	7



22

## Reading Profiles from the Adult Reading Components Study

	Sally	Rona	Ed	Leah
<b>Comprehension</b>	8	4	6	4
<b>Word Analysis</b>	3.2	3.4	2.6	5.7
<b>Word Recognition</b>	3	3	5	10
<b>Spelling</b>	3	7	1	3
<b>Oral Reading</b>	5	4	5	6
<b>Oral Vocabulary</b>	6	4	8	3
<b>Rate (WPM)</b>	110	95	104	125



23

## Reading Profiles from the Adult Reading Components Study

	Ruth	Mary	Luis	Tia
<b>Comprehension</b>	6	2	4	4
<b>Word Analysis</b>	7.5	1.2	3.7	3.3
<b>Word Recognition</b>	7	2	5	4
<b>Spelling</b>	7	3	3	5
<b>Oral Reading</b>	10	5	12	7
<b>Oral Vocabulary</b>	7	4	4	5
<b>Rate (WPM)</b>	140	83	130	118



24

## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

For good readers procedural strategies for understanding are **automatic**. We do them without thinking.

But poor readers need to be **explicitly taught** the reading strategies that good readers use.



25

## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

“...when [mid-high level] readers are given cognitive strategy instruction, they make significant gains on measures of reading comprehension over students trained with conventional instruction procedures”

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups*. (NIH Publication No. 00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 4-40



26

## What Is Strategy Instruction?

### Teaching learning tools

- ▶ Principles
  - ▶ Concepts
    - ▶ Rules
      - ▶ or Multi-step Processes  
learners can use  
*independently* to solve  
problems or accomplish  
learning tasks

## Teach Reading Strategies for Before, During and After Reading

- ❖ Using titles, headlines, pictures
- ❖ Thinking about what you already know
- ❖ Making predictions
- ❖ Skimming, scanning
- ❖ Using context clues
- ❖ Re-reading
- ❖ Posing and answering questions

## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Research-Based Strategies

- ❖ Comprehension monitoring (pp. 80–82)
- ❖ Graphic organizers (pp. 83–87)
- ❖ Story structure (p. 88)
- ❖ Question answering (pp. 89–91)

## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Research-Based Strategies

- ❖ Question generating (p. 92)
- ❖ Summarization (pp. 93–96)
- ❖ Multiple-strategies instruction (p. 97)
- ❖ Cooperative learning (instructional approach)  
(p. 98)

## Comprehension Monitoring

### Think Aloud: A Teacher and Reader Strategy

#### *What might you demonstrate for learners?*

- Re-reading and restating a difficult passage
- Showing confusion by asking questions
- Identifying important or not-so-important information
- Figuring out meanings of words using context clues

## Migration/Movement of Peoples

### When did people first migrate to the Western Hemisphere?

From Europe's discovery of the American "Indian" at the end of the fifteenth century to the present, the questions of who the native American populations are and how they came to the Western Hemisphere have intrigued scholars, clergymen, and laymen.

Early theories (put forth primarily by clergymen and not long after Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492) posited that the New World's indigenous people were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel, or that the Indians' ancestors were Welshmen, or even that the natives came from the fabled lost continents of Atlantis and Mu.

Excerpt from Nelson, R. (1999). *The handy history answer book*. Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 69.

## Migration/Movement of Peoples

However, the advancement of anthropology has yielded some answers: . . . it is clear that the continents were settled through migration. Many scholars believe that Asians came to America during two periods: the first, between 50,000 and 40,000 B.C.; and the second, between 26,000 and 8000 B.C. They are believed to have come by way of a great land bridge over the Bering Strait, between Asia and North America. (This causeway was covered by water from about 40,000 to 26,000 B.C. because of a period of melting, which would have prevented passage.)

Excerpt from Nelson, R. (1999). *The handy history answer book*. Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 69.



## Think-Aloud Pair Practice

- ❖ Assemble in pairs.
- ❖ Select a text to read.
- ❖ Plan a think-aloud demonstration.
- ❖ Demonstrate your think aloud to your partner.



## Comprehension Strategies

### Activity

- ❖ Form small groups.
- ❖ Select a text with which to work.
- ❖ Select one of the following strategies to use with the text:
  - Graphic Organizers (pp. 83–87)
  - Question Generating (p. 89)
  - Summarization (pp. 93–96)
  - Cooperative Learning (p. 98)
- ❖ Plan an activity using your text and strategy.



35

## Suggestions for Strategy Instruction

- ❖ Start with only one or two that are broadly applicable.
- ❖ For introduction, choose materials with familiar words and subject matter (unless the strategy involves word identification or using context clues).
- ❖ Be explicit about when to use it.
- ❖ Model strategy use and give lots of practice, reading text aloud so weaker readers can participate.
- ❖ Review strategies often.



36

## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

- ❖ What questions or comments do you have about Comprehension-Strategy Instruction?
- ❖ Which of the strategies do you think will be most useful for your students? Why?
- ❖ How do you think you can use these strategies with your students?

## Next Steps

- ❖ Individually, outline your next steps for using what you learned in this session.
- ❖ Share your next steps with someone nearby.



**Thank you!**



Please complete the  
evaluation forms!

Kaye Beall  
[kaye\\_beall@worlded.org](mailto:kaye_beall@worlded.org)