

Oral Language, Vocabulary, and Comprehension

Learner Objectives for Chapter 2

- Describe the various reasons why students might not comprehend.
- Complete a graphic organizer on dimensions of comprehension.
- Brainstorm ways of increasing, stimulating, and improving conversation in classrooms.
- Design a two-minute lesson on the meaning of one new word by:
 - using it in several contexts
 - providing a student-friendly definition
 - associating it with something visible or memorable
 - showing its relationship with some other words
 - providing practice for the student(s)
- View a videotape of guided oral reading instruction and identify the strategies the teacher is using to promote comprehension.
- Practice generating open-ended or probing questions.

Warm-Up Questions

Read each of the following scenarios. Discuss *why* and *how* the following events might affect student comprehension:

1. A student is reading a passage silently and reads the word **pamper** as **pander**.
2. A student is listening to his teacher read a story and hears the word **clowns** instead of the actual word, **clouds**.
3. A student is timing himself while reading a passage. When he is through, he is glowing about his improved reading rate. His teacher asks him to tell about what he just read, and he replies, "It doesn't matter what the story was about. It only matters how fast I can read it!"
4. A student in North Dakota is reading about **beachcombing**, and she has never been to a beach or seen an ocean.
5. A student is reading a science text and does not understand the new concept that is introduced in one paragraph. She continues on, reading the next paragraph without pausing.

6. A student decodes an unfamiliar word accurately but doesn't try to figure out its meaning in the passage.
7. A student replies to an inferential question with a brief, two-word answer.
8. A student reads a complicated, lengthy sentence with an embedded clause and phrase. While he is reading the sentence, his cell phone rings.

Comprehension Involves Many Skills and Abilities

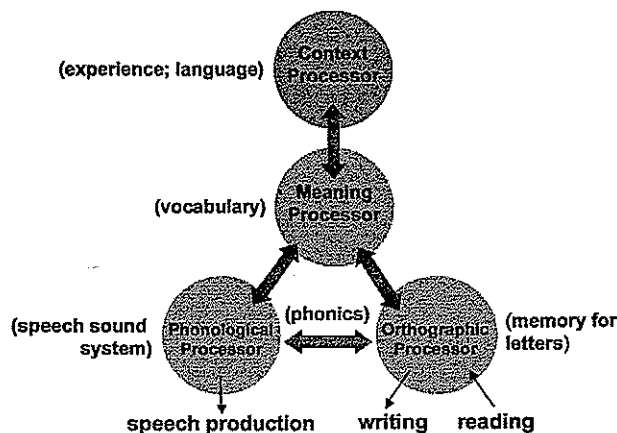
Each of the brief scenarios described in the Warm-Up embodies an important dimension of comprehension. Together, these typical classroom events begin to illustrate why comprehension depends on many different skills and abilities. Do the *sounds of language* have something to do with meaning? Yes; **clouds** and **clowns** are words that differ only in one speech sound, but diverge in meaning. Do *oral language, vocabulary, attention, background knowledge, and experience* all have an influence on comprehension? By all means. All of these variables, and others, contribute individually and in combination to listening comprehension and reading comprehension. This section provides a glimpse into these relationships and identifies a few proven classroom practices for fostering oral language, vocabulary, and comprehension abilities.

Before you begin Exercise 2.1, look back at Chapter 1 to review the list of language ingredients (see Exercise 1.2) and to review the slide illustrations that label the four neural processors that are critical for word recognition. Then, complete the graphic organizer in Exercise 2.1.

Exercise 2.1

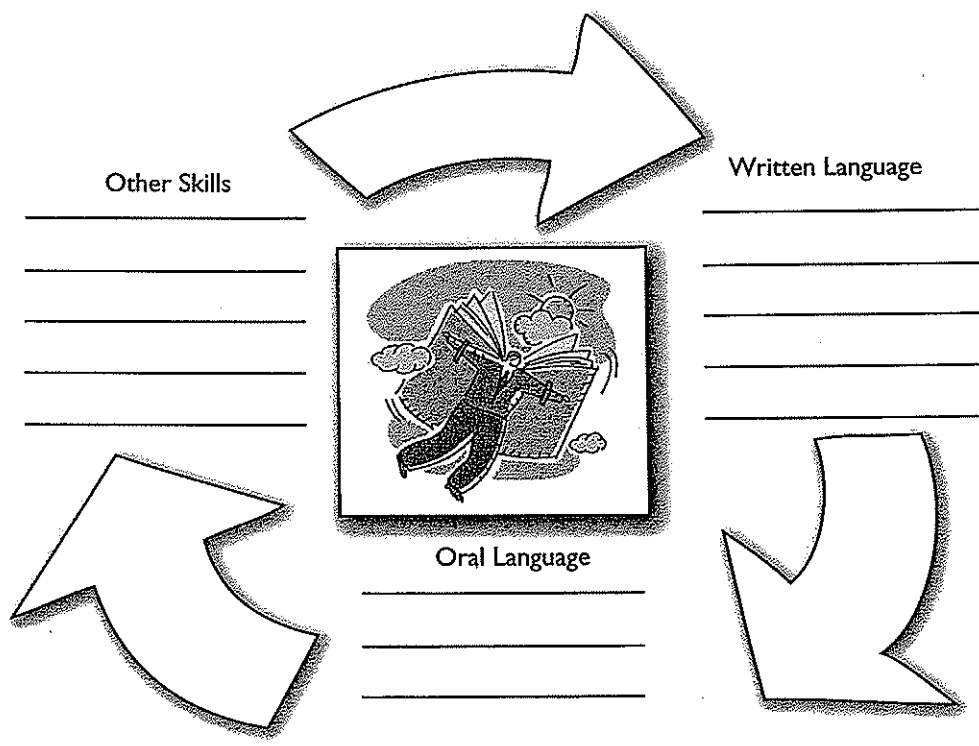
Oral Language, Written Language, and Reading Comprehension

Four-Part Processing System Necessary for Word Recognition During Reading



Exercise 2.1 (continued)

- How does oral language connect with written language, and how do other nonlinguistic factors combine with language to enable reading comprehension?
- Below is a simple graphic organizer depicting the interactions among these variables. Place each of the terms listed below the organizer in the blank lines under the headings you think best define them. (Some terms may apply to more than one heading.)



Terms for the graphic organizer: decoding, semantics, syntax, verbal reasoning, phonology, background knowledge and experience, orthography, pragmatics, morphology, attention, self-regulation, phonics, discourse comprehension, concept formation, vocabulary.

- Check your responses with the group's responses. How did you do? What have you learned about the relationships among oral language, written language, and reading comprehension?
- Now write a short paragraph that summarizes the main idea depicted by this graphic organizer.

Making Sense of the Components of Reading Comprehension

When one dissects and isolates the many skills and abilities necessary for fluent reading with comprehension, learning to read can seem like an almost impossible task! It seems even more remarkable that so many students read quite well. Not only must the basic elements of the reading process be learned, but students must also attend to the task at hand, regulate their own reading rate, and read for specific purposes (Westby, 2004). The notion that reading comprehension is very complex and multidimensional is of critical importance to educators who want to increase reading levels and improve higher-order thinking skills. Without this

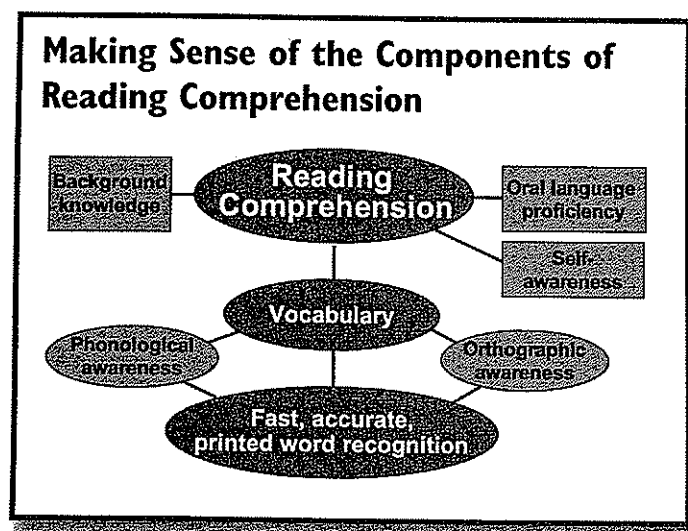
perspective, teachers may be influenced by fads and pay too little attention to the anchors that ground comprehension: decoding, oral language proficiency, vocabulary, background knowledge, and the ability to connect what is read to other contexts, including one's own and others' experiences.

How, actually, do we make sense of written text? The processes of comprehension can be described as labyrinthine. In a reading maze (see next page), when we run into a blind alley (i.e., lack of understanding), instead of reading ahead, we seek another route through the text. Mental problem solving during reading can involve: (a) *rereading* or searching the text to *clarify*; (b) asking

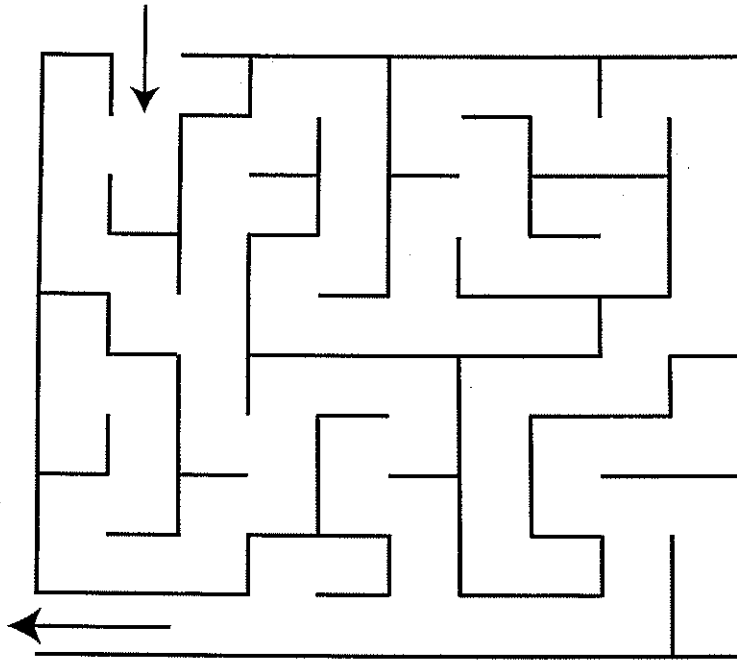
oneself a *question* and seeking the answer before continuing; (c) mentally *summarizing* what has been read so far; or (d) *predicting* where the text is going (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Good readers engage in these mental habits automatically. In addition, good readers employ skills or tools for problem solving, such as: (a) knowing how to recognize a *main idea* and a *detail*; (b) knowing what to expect of certain text *genres* or organizational features; and (c) recognizing *key transition words* that signify logical relationships in the text (Williams, 2006). If we make the right turns, we'll come out of the reading maze with comprehension in place! But novice readers need a guide—a teacher—to help them learn how to navigate text.

The skills and strategies a reader knows for navigating text will determine whether he will emerge from the experience successful or whether he will become lost or stymied. Good readers generally have a better “tool kit” in the following language domains:

- **Vocabulary.** Knowledge of word meanings reflects home environment and social learning experience. Vocabulary depends greatly on exposure to language models.
- **Oral language proficiency.** Command of word form, sentence structure, and discourse are all parts of oral language. Oral language ability includes the production of words, sentences, and discourse.



- **Print knowledge.** More-advantaged children probably learned the ABCs and other features of books before kindergarten; less-advantaged children may be unfamiliar with books and print.
- **Background knowledge of the world.** Children who have been read to, talked to, and taken places typically have much more robust knowledge of many topics.
- **Self-awareness during reading.** A good reader keeps track of her comprehension and uses various “repair strategies” if comprehension breaks down.



Readers experience the maze of reading by maneuvering through the turns, recognizing when the road to meaning is blocked, and retracing steps until the way becomes clear again. Reading is a labyrinthine process dependent on many strategies and skills. The teacher is a guide who leads students through the maze.

Students need teachers who will teach the skills of reading comprehension and who will build oral language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through reading aloud, discussion, and verbal modeling.

How Do Language Foundations Develop?

For the five or so years before children enter school, they develop oral language foundations that will affect them for the remainder of their lives. In the best of circumstances, children have ample opportunity to hear good language models, to interact with others, and to speak. Language is stimulated through conversation about shared experience, and language learning is by nature embedded in a social context. Caregivers' language patterns are very influential; children learn the form of language that they have been loved in. A unique and important study by Hart and Risley (1995), summarized in the following abstract, found that children from advantaged households with more highly verbal parents were far better prepared for academic learning than children from low-language or language-impooverished households.

Abstract of a Scientific Study of Language and Literacy*

The analysis of two and one-half years of data collected on the number of utterances children heard in forty-two professional, working, and low-SES families yielded many findings. By the age of three, the spoken vocabularies recorded for the *children* from professional families were larger than those recorded for the *parents* in the low-SES families. Between professional and low-SES parents, there was a difference of almost fifteen hundred words spoken per hour. Extrapolating this verbal interaction to a year, a child in a professional family would hear eleven million words; a child in a low-SES family would hear just three million. Follow-up studies at age nine showed that the large differences in the amount of children's language experience were tightly linked to large differences in child outcomes.

Detailed findings from *Meaningful Differences* (Hart & Risley, 1995) adapted from an interview with Dr. Todd Risley:

- From birth, average children heard about *fifteen hundred* words an hour addressed to them. Talkative parents exhibited the same talkative behaviors with their babies *before* the babies spoke and continued the same language behaviors when their children began to speak.
- The average four-year-old child, figuring one hundred hours a week from birth, heard *thirty million* words addressed to him/her.
- Children of talkative, college-educated, professional parents heard *forty-eight million* words addressed to them by the time they were four.
- Children in low-language, low-SES families heard *thirteen million* words addressed to them by the time they were four.
- Vocabularies of the children in poverty began and stayed relatively small and of poor quality.
- The low-SES children's parents spoke far less to them. Children heard they were right about 120 thousand times and they heard they were wrong about 250 thousand times. Their more affluent peers heard they were right about 750 thousand times and about 120 thousand times that they were wrong.
- Talkative parents produce talkative children. Reticent parents produce reticent children. When children begin to talk, they will be either talkative or reticent, depending on how much language they have been exposed to in the home.
- The relationship between the total amount of parent talk a child heard and the child's vocabulary size was .6.
- The relationship between the extra talk (talk that is above and beyond the daily business talk) was related .78 to IQ as measured by the Stanford Binet.
- All the variation in outcomes is explained by the amount of talking in the family to the babies before age three.

- The relationship between extra talk before the children were three years old was .77, with the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test scores at age nine in the third grade.
- Vocabulary use at age three was strongly related to reading comprehension scores in third grade.

The authors of this study also concluded several years after the initial study that, given more exposure to language through conversation, children from less-advantaged homes demonstrated increased oral language abilities, vocabularies, and emergent literacy skills. Therefore, building oral language skills must be an important focus from the earliest years and throughout all of a student's educational experience.

See www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/risley.htm for more information.

* Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

The “Rich Language” Classroom

The study of oral language comprises many topics, including social and cognitive factors in development, metacognition, and memory. In *LETRS Foundations*, we will focus on the development of discourse, more commonly known as the use of language in conversation and discussion. The ability to perceive, understand, store, and retrieve language at all levels develops through varied and multiple verbal exchanges with caring adults and peers. The “rich-language” classroom is one in which students are listening to new language in books and conversation, are talking to each other and to adults, are trying out new words, are expanding thoughts and observations, and are making their needs known. Quiet is not always best for learning!

Stimulating Oral Language in the Classroom

What does a classroom devoted to the development and support of oral language sound like? To begin, the teacher creates opportunities for students to listen to and use language. As with all productive teaching, the opportunities are purposeful and planned, and the techniques have been proven to demonstrate growth. Here are several methods to practice and incorporate oral language into classrooms on a daily basis.

Conversation

Conversation is a meaningful exchange between individuals that follows rules of turn-taking, listening, and responding. The goal of classroom conversation is to encourage more student talk, more peer interaction, and longer utterances. This is not as easy as it seems; anyone who has tried to pull words out of a student's mouth when the student responds

minimally or not at all knows how excruciatingly difficult this can be! The teacher, more often than not, takes the easy road and ends up doing all the talking, unless he or she is determined to get students talking.

Exercise 2.2 Have a 30-second Conversation in Your Imagination

- Think of a student you know who has limited language skills. Imagine having a conversation with this student, just the two of you. Think of a question or a prompt you would use to begin a conversation on a topic you know the student is familiar with.

- Now, imagine having a 30-second conversation with that student. Your instructor will time the conversation.
- What did 30 seconds feel like? Did it seem like a long time? How much conversation could you have with that student if you allowed 30 seconds every day?
- Take 30 more seconds to tell another participant how you kept your “conversation” going with the nonverbal student.

Language-Stimulation Techniques

These four techniques are described in more detail by Lucy Hart Paulson, author of *Early Childhood LETRS* (Hart Paulson, in press) and a language-development specialist. Use these techniques to assist your low-language students to become more capable of verbal discourse!

1. **Student-oriented responses.** These are used to create and maintain a shared conversation between a student and an adult.
Waiting: The adult uses a slow pace during conversations, listens actively to the student, and does not dominate the conversation.
Extending: The adult repeats what the student says and adds a small amount of information.
2. **Interaction responses.** These are used to help build a student’s verbal confidence.
Pausing: The adult pauses expectantly and frequently during interactions with the student to encourage turn-taking and student participation.
Confirming: The adult responds to the student’s utterances by confirming understanding of the student’s intentions.
3. **Language-modeling responses.** These are used to provide language modeling and demonstration of word meaning (vocabulary), word use and sentence structure

(morphology and syntax), and modifications of language use in social settings (pragmatics) (Justice, 2004).

Labeling: The adult provides the labels for familiar and unfamiliar objects, actions, and concepts.

"I Do, We Do, You Do": This technique is most closely related to the intentional systematic instruction that strengthens student learning. Using the simple formula of "I Do, We Do, You Do," the adult:

- a. Models a concept.
 - b. Repeats the concept with the student.
 - c. Directs the student to demonstrate the concept on his own.
4. **Scaffolding strategies.** Scaffolding is a technique whereby students are encouraged to perform at slightly more complex levels over time, first with assistance and then, as they become proficient, with more independence. When instruction is scaffolded, teachers gradually release their support and feedback as students take more responsibility for task completion. The idea of scaffolding can be applied to reading and to the production of oral language in the classroom. The scaffolds are gradually removed as students gain verbal skill.

The following scaffolding strategies are used during read-alouds to increase the amount and quality of oral language that students produce. Both pictures and written text can serve as stimuli for oral language production. Read these over before starting Exercise 2.3.

Read-Aloud Literacy Scaffolds for Young Students

- **Labeling and commenting:** The teacher looks at, points to, and talks about pictures in stories.
- **Verbal dialogue about a picture or story line:** The teacher creates a story based on the pictures in a book or provides a story line.
- **Use of tag questions:** The teacher uses this type of question in conversations with students to help bridge students' understanding and to gain agreement (e.g., "That's a dog, *isn't it?* He likes red cars, *doesn't he?*").
- **Use of direct questions:** The teacher uses pointed questions to *confirm* what students understand.

Read-Aloud Literacy Scaffolds for Intermediate and Older Students

- **Pauses:** The teacher directs students to supply missing words in sentences or to anticipate what will come next. Students read along as the teacher reads the material. When critical terms and vocabulary are approached, the teacher stops and students read the word(s).
- **Reading text with syntax simplification:** When the sentence structure is too difficult for students, the teacher simplifies the story line (e.g., "The sparrows implored Peter Rabbit to exert himself" becomes "The birds told Peter to try harder").

- **Story retelling:** The teacher summarizes the story and/or encourages the student to tell the story in her own words (e.g., “Peter got stuck in the garden and almost got caught”).

The next exercise involves role play of scaffolding techniques used during reading aloud (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998).

Exercise 2.3 Read-Aloud Scaffolding Strategies: Role Play

Scaffolding With Pictures

- Work with a partner to practice the language-stimulation strategies. Read the scaffolding techniques listed under the pictures and the book excerpts. For each technique, use the pictures and/or text to compose “teacher-talk” that is appropriate to the grade level you teach.
- Refer to the language-stimulation strategies described previously, and role-play them with a partner. Be ready to share your scaffolding techniques with the group. (Remember to follow the “I Do, We Do, You Do” procedure!)



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Verbal dialogue about a picture or story line: The teacher creates a story based on the pictures in a book or provides a story line.

Use of tag questions: (e.g., “That’s a dog, *isn’t it?* He likes red cars, *doesn’t he?*”)

Use of direct questions: The teacher uses pointed questions to *confirm* what students understand.

* Photos by Scott Schliebe and Dave Menke, respectively/USFWS.

Exercise 2.3 (continued)

Scaffolding With Text

Excerpt from *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London:

Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing, not alone for himself, but for every tide-water dog, strong of muscle and with warm, long hair, from Puget Sound to San Diego. Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal, and because steamship and transportation companies were booming the find, thousands of men were rushing into the Northland. These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were heavy dogs, with strong muscles by which to toil, and furry coats to protect them from the frost.

Excerpt from *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott:

"What in the world are those girls about now?" thought Laurie, opening his sleepy eyes to take a good look, for there was something rather peculiar in the appearance of his neighbors. Each wore a large, flapping hat, a brown linen pouch slung over one shoulder, and carried a long staff. Meg had a cushion, Jo a book, Beth a basket, and Amy a portfolio. All walked quietly through the garden, out at the little back gate, and began to climb the hill that lay between the house and river.

"Well, that's cool," said Laurie to himself, "to have a picnic and never ask me! They can't be going in the boat, for they haven't got the key. Perhaps they forgot it. I'll take it to them, and see what's going on."

Pauses: The teacher directs students to supply missing words in sentences or to anticipate what will come next.

Reading text with syntax simplification: When the sentence structure is too difficult for students, the teacher simplifies the story line (e.g., "The sparrows implored Peter Rabbit to exert himself" becomes "The birds told Peter to try harder").

Story retelling: The teacher summarizes the story and/or encourages the student to tell the story in her own words (e.g., "Peter got stuck in the garden and almost got caught").

Take 2 Review

- Complete this two-column organizer.
- In the first column are restatements of main ideas. Work with the group or your partner to complete the second column. List a few details that elaborate the main ideas or that state the relevance of those ideas for your school or classroom.

Knowledge/Main Ideas	Application/Details
1. Reading comprehension is a multifaceted skill.	
2. Students' oral language skills can be improved through a variety of purposeful activities involving teacher-directed discourse.	

Teaching Vocabulary in the Classroom

- During a visit to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, a father was overheard talking with his captivated four-year-old son. As they were viewing lively sea otters zipping through the water, splashing and playing with a variety of toys, the father said, "Look at that otter amusing himself with his frisbee. He is wreaking havoc with it!"
- Later the same day, while contemplating the glowing luminescence of a tank full of softly gliding jellyfish, another parent was overheard saying to her young child, "Don't touch the glass."

These two examples present divergent levels of discourse and very different use of vocabulary. If these interactions represent habits of communication, it is obvious which child is more likely to have higher levels of oral language and vocabulary. Over time, the first child will hear many more and varied words than the second child, and thus may be more likely to comprehend well during reading.

Vocabulary is defined as the words one understands and/or uses for communication. Our receptive and expressive vocabularies are usually different; most of us understand or recognize more word meanings than we use ourselves. We are not using the term vocabulary for words the child can decode or recognize in print.

If a young child says, “When we find a spider in our house, we deport him,” we’re likely to assume the child is bright. Vocabulary is socially and cognitively linked with intelligence. Vocabulary tests are often used by researchers as a proxy for verbal intelligence because the correlation between vocabulary and overall cognitive ability is high. Vocabulary is also linked with higher levels of phoneme awareness and decoding ability in reading and greater proficiency in passage reading comprehension (Torgesen, 2005). Because of these many connections between word knowledge and other language abilities, vocabulary has a dominant position on the radar screens of researchers and teachers. Vocabulary development leads to higher levels of reading comprehension.

Vocabulary Instruction: Implicit and Explicit

Implicit (Indirect) Teaching

A student’s vocabulary grows through three distinct experiences:

1. Being in supportive environments where words are used in conversation.
2. Engaging in wide reading.
3. Learning through explicit instruction.

Students increase their vocabulary when adults who are using the oral language stimulation techniques mentioned previously (i.e., student-oriented responses, interaction responses, language-modeling responses, and scaffolding strategies) make additional efforts to include rare and unusual words. Reading itself increases exposure to words and thus enlarges vocabulary. These are forms of **implicit** teaching. Implicit teaching happens through exposure to verbal material and accounts for the learning of thousands of words (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Additionally, reading aloud from texts that contain unusual and rare vocabulary is an essential vehicle for teaching “literate” language before students can read those words for themselves. These methods should be used in any classroom:

- **Read orally to students often, and employ dialogic reading techniques.** Choose text that provides exposure to unique and rare vocabulary. Use the vocabulary to discuss the reading selection during and after reading. Dialogic reading means that the dialogue is shared and interactive. Students are talking, too!
- **Include informational books for oral reading.** This is especially important in schools with high numbers of students who have had limited opportunities to experience and interact with the wider world and therefore may not know the vocabularies associated with those experiences.

- **Lead and promote discussions using vocabulary from the readings.** For example, ask students, “Why do you think she decided to give him the note? Use the word *frustrated* in your response.” Apply new vocabulary in discussions about familiar concepts in a variety of contexts and settings.
- **Increase opportunities for students to read on their own as their reading skills and fluency rates improve.** Remember, *monitored oral reading* is preferred to silent, unmonitored reading for students who are still mastering basic reading skills. Monitored reading means that the teacher checks to ensure that the reading level is appropriate (i.e., students read with at least 90 percent accuracy). Monitoring requires listening to students read for a brief period of time and checking for comprehension.

As important as teaching vocabulary implicitly is, however, it is not enough (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). One exposure to a word will seldom be enough to generate deep knowledge of that word. Approximately six to twelve exposures to a word in context are usually needed before students can determine a meaning, remember it, and use the word correctly (Jenkins, Stein, & Wysocki, 1984)! Additionally, students with language disabilities may require even more exposures and opportunities to use new vocabulary before the words are learned. Therefore, teachers must also provide **explicit** vocabulary instruction to enhance and increase students’ vocabularies.

Explicit (Direct) Teaching

There are two main issues to consider in planning explicit vocabulary instruction: (1) which words to teach; and (2) how to get their meanings across. Each of these issues is discussed below, along with a sample vocabulary lesson and an opportunity to try out a few techniques.

Choosing Words to Teach

Preteaching selected words that students will hear and read can increase vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Preteaching primes the pump; it alerts students to pay attention to how the words will be used in context. Choosing words for instruction, however, can be a challenging task, because there are so many words to choose from. Which ones will be best, and how many words should be taught? This dilemma has been examined by many researchers (e.g., Beck et al., 2002; Graves, 2006) who have developed a way to think about choosing the best words to teach:

- **Choose words that have *high utility*,** or words that students may not be familiar with but will encounter often and that can be applied in discussions about a variety of experiences.
- **Choose words for which students have a concept** and know another more common word with which to define the chosen word.
- **Choose three to five words per reading selection.** Depending on the age of the students and their current language levels, the number of words may increase. Beck et al. (2002) recommend setting a goal of 400 words per year.

To address the issue of which words to teach, Beck et al. (2002) have recommended that words be sorted into three tiers, or levels, as described below. The words teachers choose to teach will also depend on their students' grade level, background experience, and knowledge about the reading topics. For example, younger students and ESL students may need proportionately more instruction with Level One words. Most students, however, benefit from instruction focused on Level Two words.

Level One: Most students know these words.

- Basic, common vocabulary that children learn early (e.g., **sad, laugh, hot**).
- Important for high-risk learners and ELL/ESL students.
- Critical to the comprehension of written material.

Level Two: Highlight these words to teach explicitly.

- High-frequency, yet more sophisticated than basic words (e.g., **avoid, fortunate, industrious**).
- Can be applied to discussions across many contexts and experiences.
- Words for which students have a concept and can use a basic word to define (e.g., **fortunate** can be defined with **lucky**; **industrious** can be defined with **hardworking** or **busy**).
- Should be taught in depth; aim to teach about 400 words per year, or 12–15 words per week.

Level Three: Provide brief definition in context and move on.

- Low-occurrence words, yet critical to understanding a specific domain.
- May be particular to certain topics or fields of endeavor (e.g., **crochet, seam, bias**).
- Instruct these individual words when the need arises.

Exercise 2.4 Practice Selecting Words to Teach

- Choose one of the following three excerpts that is most representative of reading material for the grade level you teach: *Flashy Fantastic Rain Forest Frogs*, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, or *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
- After reading the text selection, list potential words for vocabulary instruction in the chart. Identify five Level One words and five Level Two words, and determine if there are any Level Three words. The Level Two words will be the target words for explicit instruction.
- Be ready to share your thinking for choosing and grouping the words.

(continued)

Exercise 2.4 (continued)

FLASHY FANTASTIC RAIN FOREST FROGS

By D. H. Patent

New York: Walker & Company, 1997

(Read-aloud K–grade 2, also grades 3 and 4)

The disguise of the horned frogs also protects them from becoming food for larger animals. Many small frogs protect themselves by hiding, too. Some have brown patterns that disguise them on tree trunks or among dead leaves.

Glass frogs are hard to see on green leaves. Much of their skin has no color at all. It is sometimes hard to see where the glass frog ends and the leaf begins.

A few rain forest frogs have a special way to avoid predators. They have big feet with webbing between the toes. Some also have flaps of skin on the sides of their bodies. To escape, the frog jumps in the air and spreads out its feet. The webbing and flaps act like wings and slow the frog's fall as it glides gently downward. When the frog reaches another tree, it can hang on with just one giant toe pad until it can grab with its foot.

Poison dart frogs don't need to hide or escape. They hop fearlessly about on the forest floor during the day. Their bright colors warn predators: "Don't touch me." Only a few animals can eat them, because their skin contains bitter-tasting chemicals. Some of these chemicals are very poisonous.

Level One (common words)	Level Two (most important words to teach in depth)	Level Three (specialty terms, define briefly)

Exercise 2.4 (continued)

This excerpt is from Chapter 10 of *Mr. Popper's Penguins*. Captain Cook, a penguin from the South Pole, has been sent to Mr. Popper's house as a gift by an Antarctic explorer whom Mr. Popper admires. Captain Cook seems to have adjusted to his new home and family; he has built himself a nest in the refrigerator. But suddenly, Captain Cook begins to show signs of unhappiness, sulking alone and refusing to play with the children in the house as he has before:

MR. POPPER'S PENGUINS

By Richard and Florence Atwater

New York: Little, Brown Young Readers, 1992 (originally published 1938)

(Text excerpt for grades 4–6)

"Better leave him alone, children," said Mrs. Popper. "He feels mopey, I guess."

But it was soon clear that it was something worse than mopiness that ailed Captain Cook. All day he would sit with his little white-circled eyes staring out sadly from the refrigerator. His coat had lost its lovely, glossy look; his round little stomach grew flatter every day.

He would turn away now when Mrs. Popper would offer him some canned shrimps.

One day she took his temperature. It was one hundred and four degrees.

"Well, Papa," she said, "I think you had better call the veterinary doctor. I am afraid Captain Cook is really ill."

But when the veterinary doctor came, he only shook his head. He was a very good animal doctor, and though he had never taken care of a penguin before, he knew enough about birds to see at a glance that this one was seriously ill.

"I will leave you some pills. Give him one every hour. Then you can try feeding him on sherbet and wrapping him in ice packs. But I cannot give you any encouragement because I am afraid it is a hopeless case. This kind of bird was never made for this climate, you know. I can see that you have taken good care of him, but an Antarctic penguin can't thrive in Stillwater."

Level One (common words)	Level Two (most important words to teach in depth)	Level Three (specialty terms, define briefly)

Exercise 2.4 (continued)

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

By Arthur Conan Doyle

New York: Modern Library, 2002 (originally published 1902)

(Text excerpt for intermediate and secondary levels)

"Really, Watson, you excel yourself," said Holmes, pushing back his chair . . . "I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements, you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt."

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eyes. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.

"Interesting, though elementary," said he as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. "There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick. It gives us the basis for several deductions."

Level One (common words)	Level Two (most important words to teach in depth)	Level Three (specialty terms, define briefly)

Exercise 2.4 (continued)

To review:

- **Level One** are *high-frequency words*.
- **Level Two** words *deserve the greatest focus in instruction*. They are:
 - “Big Idea” words necessary to understand the central idea in a passage.
 - “Academic tool kit” words likely to be encountered across subject areas.
 - High-use words in an area of content study such as biology or history.
 - Multiple-meaning words used in a new way.
 - “Academic-discourse words” that are generally not found in everyday conversation.
- **Level Three** are specialty or domain-specific words that may not generalize across readings or appear with high frequency.

Discussion: What student characteristics did you consider when choosing and sorting your words?

Vocabulary: How to Get Meanings Across

Because we have such limited time to make a big impact in students' vocabulary learning, we want to make sure that the words we teach are judiciously selected and that we apply the most effective teaching methods to ensure that students are increasing their vocabulary levels. We want to teach words that will *enhance* vocabulary choices—not reiterate words that students already know—and make word-learning an all-day, everyday event! Our excitement about big words, precise words, and unusual words can transfer to and energize students as we purposefully use those new words regularly in conversation within many contexts.

Criteria for Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Apply these proven criteria for vocabulary instruction every day until they become second nature in the classroom:

- **Provide multiple exposures.** Students need at least six exposures to a word *in a variety of contexts* over time in order to learn the word.
- **Use the vocabulary words in interactive discourse.** Prompt students to use the vocabulary in their conversations with you and each other.
- **Teach vocabulary so that learning one word leads to learning many words.** Introduce words within a network of related words, synonyms, and antonyms.

Steps for Teaching a Vocabulary Word Explicitly

The following steps can be used to teach a vocabulary word explicitly. The steps provide *multiple exposures* within a setting of *interactive discourse* and introduce students to an *extended selection of words*, meeting each of the criteria just listed.

1. Use the word in several contexts, pronouncing it clearly.
2. Provide a student-friendly definition.
3. Associate the word with something visual or memorable.
4. Show the word's relationship to some other words.
5. Provide practice for students, saying and using the word.

Exercise 2.5

Part 1:

Learn (and Teach) a New Word

- Experience the introduction of a new vocabulary word by your instructor. (You are playing the role of a classroom student and your instructor is playing the role of the classroom teacher.)
- Observe the application of the five teaching steps just listed, and note how these steps affect your learning of the new word.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- Complete this Four-Square as directed.

1. What it is	2. What it is not
<div style="border: 2px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> lexicon </div>	
3. Definition	4. Picture

A Few Good Vocabulary-Development Activities

A variety of vocabulary practice activities should be in every teacher's tool kit. Here are a few good ones.

Four-Square

Two examples of a Four-Square are illustrated here.

1. Give students one of the Four-Square templates.
2. Working together with students, fill in the boxes—first writing the word, then adding examples and non-examples of the word, defining the word, and ending with a picture that will help students recall the meaning.
3. Talk through the different contexts students will have for the word before they choose their context and draw their picture.
4. Post the completed Four-Squares in the classroom or use them to create student dictionaries for review purposes.

1. Word	2. Examples
3. Definition	4. Picture

1. What it is	2. What it is not
3. Definition	4. Picture

(Word)

Select and Connect

This group activity is great for reviewing previously taught vocabulary and is an effective language-builder.

1. Create and display two columns of words from previous lessons on a whiteboard or chart paper. (The number of words in a column should be determined by the age of the students. Younger students are more successful if they have fewer words to choose from.)
2. Instruct students to choose a word from column 1 and a word from column 2 that can be associated with each other.

3. Ask one student to draw a line that connects the two words, and then ask him/her to explain how the two words go together. (You may need to model this step for young students.)
4. Continue by choosing two other words, and asking students to explain how the words go together. (Words can be used more than once.)
5. Continue until all words have been connected and their connections have been explained.

What words in these columns can you connect to each other? Explain your reasoning!

Column 1	Column 2
pragmatics	syntax
phonology	approval
lexicon	discourse
oral language	orthographic
semantics	vocabulary

Partner Chatter

Partner Chatter provides opportunities for students to use the new vocabulary word(s) in conversation.

1. After new vocabulary has been introduced, discussed in a variety of contexts, and after many examples have been provided, instruct students to partner up and chatter.
2. Monitor student conversations to ensure that they are using the target word(s) correctly in their conversations.
3. When you hear a good example of the word(s) being used, repeat the conversation to the class (e.g., "I just heard the word **lexicon** used to describe a very big, heavy book in our classroom!").
4. Follow Partner Chatter with a few direct questions (e.g., "Did your partner use our new word **lexicon**? Did your partner use a form of our new word **lexicon**? What words did you hear?").

Exercise 2.5 Part 2: Plan Instruction of a New Word

- Working with a partner, pick one of the Level Two words you chose from *Flashy Fantastic Rain Forest Frogs*, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, or *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
- Develop a routine for teaching that word, using the steps outlined here. Be ready to teach your word!

<p>Word: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the word in several contexts: _____ 2. Provide a student-friendly definition: _____ 3. Associate it with something visual or memorable: _____ 4. Show its relationship to other words: _____ 5. Provide practice: _____ 6. Teach your word to a partner!

Take 2 Review

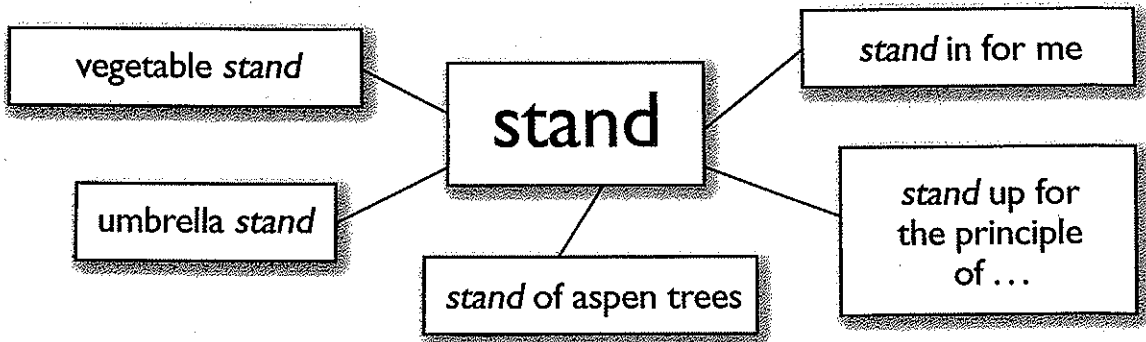
- Complete this two-column organizer.
- In the first column are restatements of main ideas. Work with the group or your partner to complete the second column. List a few details that elaborate the main ideas or that state the relevance of those ideas for your school or classroom.

Knowledge/Main Ideas	Application/Details
1. Students learn vocabulary through implicit means.	
2. Students learn vocabulary through explicit instruction.	

More Good Vocabulary Instruction Activities

Multiple Meanings

High-frequency words often have many meanings and uses. How many meanings and uses can you think of for the word **stand**? They can be depicted in a graphic organizer, like the one below.



Choose one of the following multiple-meaning words—or one of your own choosing—and create another graphic organizer to show the many meanings for that word.

arm	bug	chest	beat	dot	up	cross
pan	lift	row	sink	tent	track	design

Categories

Assign the following words to one of two categories in the table: words with positive connotations or words with negative connotations.

abrupt	important	corruption	supportive	disruptive
interruption	transport	corrupt	portable	rupture
abruptly	pandemonium	zoophobia	telephone	telepath
pathogen	anachronism	claustrophobic	psychopath	innovative

Words With Positive Connotations	Words With Negative Connotations

Can you create other categories and subcategories for these vocabulary words? After doing so, sort them into the categories and subcategories you created. What do you need to know to accomplish this task? What kind of graphic organizer can you create to organize the information?

Vocabulary Note-Taking Guide

(Contributed by Kevin Feldman [personal communication, 2007] and Kate Kinsella, used with permission.)

Did you learn any new words in this section? Write them in the Note-Taking Guide below, define them, and provide an example or sentence to show you have learned the word.

Word	Definition	Example/Sentence
adaptation (n.) (adapt, v.)	The capacity or process of adjusting to the demands of an environment.	Birds' adaptations to extreme cold include increasing their metabolism and fluffing their feathers.
reliable (adj.) (rely, v.)	The quality of being dependable or able to be counted on.	Reliable friends do what they say they will do.

What Else Is There to Learn About Vocabulary?

In LETRS *Module 4, The Mighty Word: Building Vocabulary and Oral Language* (Moats, 2004d), participants learn to view words from many angles that can be exploited in instruction. Participants also explore in more detail how vocabulary and comprehension are related, and learn additional ways to explicitly teach vocabulary. Module 4 stresses the importance of semantic features, categorizing, and connecting word form with word meaning. Teachers learn how to help students create better definitions for words and become more precise in their word choice.

Teaching Reading Comprehension

Dig Into the Content

We have explored oral language and vocabulary before discussing reading comprehension for good reason. Comprehension begins with oral language and the words we know and use, so it makes sense that educators begin their study of comprehension by examining these components and how to teach them.

Preparing to teach and then leading students through the learning process can be gratifying. But how is it done? Some programs create a formula or routine for teaching comprehension strategies, but formulaic teaching may miss the point—to engage students in deep thinking about a topic or text. Regardless of the text at hand, teaching formulas such as enumerating and memorizing strategies may not serve the purpose of real engagement in meaning-making. We do not want to put *all* of our savings in the strategy bank. Not only are there multiple component skills involved in comprehension, but the most useful ones vary according to the text being read and the reader's purpose for reading. Further, once a skill or strategy has been taught, students need to be able to apply it automatically, as a habit of thinking—and focus on what is being studied. The most effective methods for teaching students how to comprehend text are those that foster active response, either written or spoken. In addition, effective teachers lead the way through the text, provide a platform for discussion, and take care to ask probing questions in an environment that encourages genuine inquiry.

An Analogy to Swimming

Let's use a familiar analogy to portray the progression of comprehension instruction. Imagine teaching a young child to swim in a lake. We begin by holding her hand and wading in the shallow water. At this stage, access to open water is limited and we are focused on establishing the child's comfort level with the water and the unknown. Reading comprehension begins the same way. The depth of text and topic exploration may be limited by the questions we ask. At a surface or beginning level, we might ask students to recognize or recall facts, definitions, and details from the text, such as, "What did the boy find under his bed?" or "How does an ant care for its baby?" We may also model or demonstrate the thought processes involved in exploration of deeper conceptual territory, as in, "It seems to me that ants always know what job they are doing. I wonder why?"

Do we want our students to stay in shallow conceptual areas? No. We want to support students, moving together into more that is unfamiliar and challenging, just as we want the swimmer to lift her feet off the bottom. If we withdraw support too fast, however, she'll have trouble. We'll release her gradually into greater depths. In the reading lesson, we'll ask questions that broaden thinking and demand better vocabulary or more analytical or evaluative reasoning. We'll probe students with "Summarize the character's experience when he was frightened" or "What were the most important things we learned about what ants need to live?" And again, we will model such skills as drawing connections between the topic at hand and our prior experience: "I think that ants do a lot of the same kinds of work that people do!"

By modeling critical thinking, skillfully querying, providing experience with text interpretation, and guiding students through text comprehension, we will enable them to read independently for varied purposes. Deeper thinking during reading and active processing of text meanings will become habits.

Three Phases of Instruction

Text reading instruction is generally planned in three phases: (a) before reading; (b) during reading; and (c) after reading. **Before reading**, we provide background information, preview the text, and help students recognize what they might already know about a topic. **During reading**, we guide students by asking good questions at critical points in the text that will help students *clarify, predict, summarize, locate facts, make inferences, and find main ideas*. **After reading**, we *summarize, retell, and reorganize* information, *relate it* to other readings or experience, *react* to it, or *evaluate* what was learned. None of this can happen without prior planning and establishing learning goals for our students. We have to determine where we are going before we can get there! If we clearly define our students' learning outcomes, we will more clearly lead them to that learning through our prompts and modeling.

What do you already know about comprehension instruction during these three phases of reading? Use your previous experience to supply a few good teaching ideas for each phase.

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading

Asking the Perfect Questions

Learning to ask probing questions, or queries, that lead students to apply higher levels of thinking takes a lot of practice. Skillful questioning is one teaching skill that continues to grow and develop over time and with experience. Some teachers find it helpful to keep a list of effective question starters close by on a bookmark, with the lesson plan book, or visibly posted for quick reference. Here are some examples of those probing questions. Read through these queries. What sets them apart from simple recall questions?

- What do you suppose ...?
- What is the writer saying?
- What might one learn from this?
- What do you think ...?
- Why do you suppose ...?
- In what other ways ...?
- Tell me in your own words what [classmate] just said.
- Tell me in your own words what the author is saying.
- What is the relationship between ... and ...?
- What is the writer trying to say here?
- Did the writer explain this clearly?
- Does this make sense with what the writer told us before?
- Does the writer tell us why?

Exercise 2.6

View a Video Demonstration of Guided Oral Reading

(*Teaching Reading Essentials* [Moats & Farrell, 2007], Part 5, Demonstration 5.)

- As you view the video lesson demonstration, watch for answers to the questions below.

Before Reading

1. Is a content-specific goal established prior to the lesson? Yes / No

2. Are any previewing techniques used? Yes / No

Exercise 2.6 (continued)**During Reading**

1. Does the teacher help students make inferences as they read? Yes / No

2. Does the teacher ask probing or open-ended questions? Yes / No

3. Does the teacher help students make any connections to their own experiences? Yes / No

4. Does the teacher model or think aloud about her thought process? Yes / No
Does she model other reasoning processing? Yes / No

5. Is there any misinterpretation of student responses? Yes / No

After Reading

1. What does the teacher do to get closure on this lesson?

Exercise 2.7 Prepare a Text for Instruction

- After you read the text selection, develop a content-specific learning goal. What learning do you want students to take away from this reading?
- Then, list two or three queries or prompts that would lead students to realize the goal.

THE FLIES AND THE HONEY-POT

An *Aesop's Fable* translated by George Fyler Townsend

New York: Globusz Publishing, 2004

A number of flies were attracted to a jar of honey which had been overturned in a housekeeper's room, and placing their feet in it, ate greedily. Their feet, however, became so smeared with the honey that they could not use their wings, nor release themselves, and were suffocated. Just as they were expiring, they exclaimed, "O foolish creatures that we are, for the sake of a little pleasure we have destroyed ourselves." Pleasure bought with pains, hurts.

Goal: _____

Prompts: _____

- Share your goals and prompts.

Discussion questions:

- Does your comprehensive reading program provide meaning-related comprehension goals for the reading text?
- Does it instruct you to model comprehension processes such as thinking aloud?
- Are the questions in the teacher script recall questions? Inference questions? Deeper-level prompts?
- Is there anything you need to do to improve the program's comprehension instruction?

Take 2 Review

- Complete this two-column organizer.
- In the first column are restatements of main ideas. Work with the group or your partner to complete the second column. List a few details that elaborate the main ideas or that state the relevance of those ideas for your school or classroom.

Knowledge/Main Ideas	Application/Details
1. Formulaic or strategy-laden teaching may keep us from engaging students in deep thinking about a topic or text.	
2. Comprehending text should be a scaffolded process.	

What Else Is There to Learn About Comprehension?

In LETRS *Module 6, Digging for Meaning: Teaching Text Comprehension* (Moats, 2004f) and *Module 11, Writing A Road to Reading Comprehension* (Moats & Sedita, 2004), learn more about:

- Written language itself and the aspects of language that can be difficult for students to decipher
- The connections among phrases and sentences, the complexity of sentences, and the structures of expository and narrative texts
- Techniques for helping students construct the organization of ideas in a text and understand both narrative and expository texts
- Differences between questions and queries
- Comprehension strategies and skills proven by research