

What is the difference between a comprehension skill and a comprehension strategy?

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A comprehension skill is an activity that students complete for the purpose of learning about features of text like main idea or cause and effect. Comprehension skill lessons may be disconnected from text and may involve the completion of worksheets or graphic organizers that require lower level thinking. A comprehension strategy is a specific procedure or routine that students use while they are reading to help them better understand the meaning of text.

Comprehension strategy instruction involves the explicit explanation of what the strategy is, why students should use it with this specific passage, and how they can use the strategy in other situations when they don't understand what they are reading.

Example of a comprehension skill activity: The students are asked to fill out a story map with beginning, middle and end for a story from their basal reader. They complete the story map, turn it in and go on to the next activity.

Example of a comprehension strategy activity: The students are asked to fill out a story map with beginning, middle, and end for a story from their basal reader. They take notes on their story map while they are reading the story. The story map will then be used to help the students write a summary of the story. Students know that summarizing what they have read helps them remember the important parts of the story.

The National Reading Panel Report (2000) recommended the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. While some students may learn comprehension strategies informally, many students do not. "...formal instruction on these strategies is believed to lead to improvement in text understanding and information use. Instruction...is carried out by a

classroom teacher who demonstrates, models, or guides the reader on their acquisition and use. When these procedures have been acquired, the reader becomes independent of the teacher” (p. 4-40). Teachers will know that their students are learning comprehension strategies when students can independently and flexibly use a variety of strategies for a variety of purposes. Ultimately, the goal is for all students to be so proficient in the use of comprehension strategies that they do not need to consciously think about what they are doing to more deeply understand what they are reading.

Recommended Readings for Further Study:

Bergman, J.L. (1992). SAIL-A way to success and independence for low-achieving readers.

The Reading Teacher, 45(8), 598-602.

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Hacker, D., & Tenant, A. (2002). Implementing reciprocal teaching in the classroom: Overcoming obstacles and making modifications. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94,* 699-718.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (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.* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching, 3rd Edition.* New York: Guilford.

Raphael, T., Highfield, K., & Au, K. (2006). *QAR now*. New York: Scholastic.

Stahl, K. (2004). Proof, practice, and promise: Comprehension strategy instruction in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 57, 598-609.