

# Annotated Guide for Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade

## Purpose

This document was developed by the Agency of Education (AOE) to support supervisory unions and districts (SU/SDs), educators, and the Advisory Council on Literacy in performing their duties as defined in Act 28 of 2021. What follows is an annotated summary of [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) practice guide from What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). This practice guide, as summarized below, is designed to assist classroom teachers and specialists improve the reading comprehension skills of students in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade contains strategies to help students engage with and comprehend texts.

## Background and Introduction

On the page 5 of the guide, it states:

*Strong reading comprehension skills are central not only to academic and professional success, but also to a productive social and civic life. These skills build the capacity to learn independently, to absorb information on a variety of topics, to enjoy reading, and to experience literature more deeply.*

The introduction to the practice guide can be found on pages 5-9 and “provides an overview of the importance of improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade and explains key parameters considered by the panel in developing the practice guide” (5). This section of the guide also provides a summary of the recommendations as well as a discussion of the research supporting the practice guide.

## Recommendations

A review of the recommendations can be found on page 1.

The recommendation that has the strongest evidence is:

- **Recommendation 1:** “Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies” (9).

The two recommendations with “moderate” evidence include:

- **Recommendation 2:** “Teach students to identify and use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content” (9).
- **Recommendation 5:** “Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension” (9).

## Contact Information:

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The two recommendations with “minimal” evidence include:

- **Recommendation 3:** “Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text” (9).
- **Recommendation 4:** “Select texts purposefully to support comprehension development” (9).

More information about these recommendations can be found below, organized by level of evidence. See pages 3-4 of the guide for more information about what the levels of evidence mean and how they are calculated.

## **Recommendation with the Strongest Evidence**

### **Recommendation 1: Teach Students How to Use Reading Comprehension Strategies (pages 10-16)**

*Good readers use many forms of thinking and analyzing text as they read. It is therefore important to teach beginning readers strategies for constructing meaning from text. A strategy is the intentional application of a cognitive routine by a reader before, during, or after reading a text...Comprehension strategies help readers enhance their understanding, overcome difficulties in comprehending text, and compensate for weak or imperfect knowledge related to the text. (10)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on pages 10-11.

#### **How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Teach students how to use several research-based reading comprehension strategies” (12-13).
- “Teach reading comprehension strategies individually or in combination” (13-14).
- “Teach reading comprehension strategies by using a gradual release of responsibility” (15).

Potential roadblocks and solutions can be found on page 16, including a discussion of comprehension skills versus strategies.

## **Recommendations with “Moderate Evidence”**

### **Recommendation 2: Teach Students to Identify and Use the Text’s Organizational Structure to Comprehend, Learn, and Remember Content (pages 17-22)**

*The panel believes that students comprehend and remember content better when they are taught to recognize the structure of a text because it can help them to extract and construct meaning while reading. For instance, understanding how stories are organized helps students to distinguish between major and minor events and predict how a story might unfold. Students can begin to develop a sense of structure as early as kindergarten. Although instruction at that stage is typically based on narrative text, the panel believes that students in the early grades should also be exposed to informational text because its structure can build their understanding and*

*recall of key points...The idea is to prepare students to draw on what they know about structure to help them understand more complex texts. (17)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on page 17.

**How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Explain how to identify and connect the parts of narrative texts” (18-19).
- “Provide instruction on common structures of informational texts” (19-21).

Potential roadblocks and solutions can be found on pages 21-22, including how to support students in applying text structure knowledge independently.

**Recommendation 5: Establish an Engaging and Motivating Context in Which to Teach Reading Comprehension (page 34-38)**

*Students must actively engage with text to extract and construct its meaning, and they will become better readers if they are taught reading comprehension in an engaging, motivating context. A teacher can create this context by clearly conveying the purpose of each lesson, explaining to students how the comprehension strategies will help them learn, and impressing on them that the power to be successful readers rests as much with them as it does with their teacher. In addition, the panel believes that teachers must help students focus not only on completing classroom tasks but also, and more importantly, on the larger goal of learning. Teachers should choose reading materials that offer students a choice in what to read and an opportunity to collaborate with one another. (34)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on pages 34-35.

**How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Help students discover the purpose and benefits of reading” (35-36).
- “Create opportunities for students to see themselves as successful readers” (36).
- “Give students reading choices” (36-37).
- “Give students the opportunity to learn by collaborating with their peers” (37).

Potential roadblocks and solutions can be found on page 38, including what to do when students choose books that are too easy or difficult for them.

**Recommendations with “Minimal Evidence”**

**Recommendation 3: Guide Students Through Focused, High-Quality Discussion on the Meaning of Text (pages 23-29)**

*The panel recommends that teachers lead their students through focused, high-quality discussions in order to help them develop a deeper understanding of what they read. Such discussions among students or between the students and the teacher go beyond simply asking and answering surface-level questions to a more thoughtful exploration of the text. Through this type of exploration, students learn how to argue for or against points raised in the discussion, resolve ambiguities in the text, and draw conclusions or inferences about the text. (23)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on page 24.

**How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Structure the discussion to complement the text, the instructional purpose, and the readers’ ability and grade level” (24-26).
- “Develop discussion questions that require students to think deeply about text” (26).
- “Ask follow-up questions to encourage and facilitate discussion” (26-27).
- “Have students lead structured small-group discussions” (27-28).

Potential roadblocks and solutions can be found on page 29, including a concern about not having “control” of a class during student discussions.

**Recommendation 4: Select Texts Purposefully to Support Comprehension Development (pages 30-33)**

*There is no such thing as “one-size-fits-all” when it comes to selecting a text for teaching reading comprehension. The panel believes that early exposure to different types of text builds the capacity to understand the large variety of reading material that students will encounter as they move from grade to grade. Not only should teachers introduce students to a variety of texts, but teachers should also ensure that a selected text (1) is rich in depth of ideas and information, (2) has a level of difficulty commensurate with the students’ word-reading and comprehension skills, and (3) supports the purpose of the lesson. There are no specific texts that the panel believes are more appropriate than others for strategy training. Specifically for younger students, the panel believes that all texts require students to make inferences or check their understanding, and students’ comprehension could always be enhanced by retelling elements of the text. (30)*

A summary of the evidence can be found on pages 30-31.

**How to carry out the recommendation:**

- “Teach reading comprehension with multiple genres of text” (31).
- “Choose texts of high quality with richness and depth of ideas and information” (31).
- “Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for the students’ reading ability and the instructional activity” (32).
- “Use texts that support the purpose of instruction” (32).

Potential roadblocks and solutions can be found on page 33, including a concern about the overwhelmingly wide variety of available texts from which to choose.

**Resources**

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) (WWC)
- [Related Resources](#) (collection of videos and other resources from WWC related to this practice guide)

## Reference

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: A practice guide* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [whatworks.ed.gov/publications/practiceguides](https://whatworks.ed.gov/publications/practiceguides).