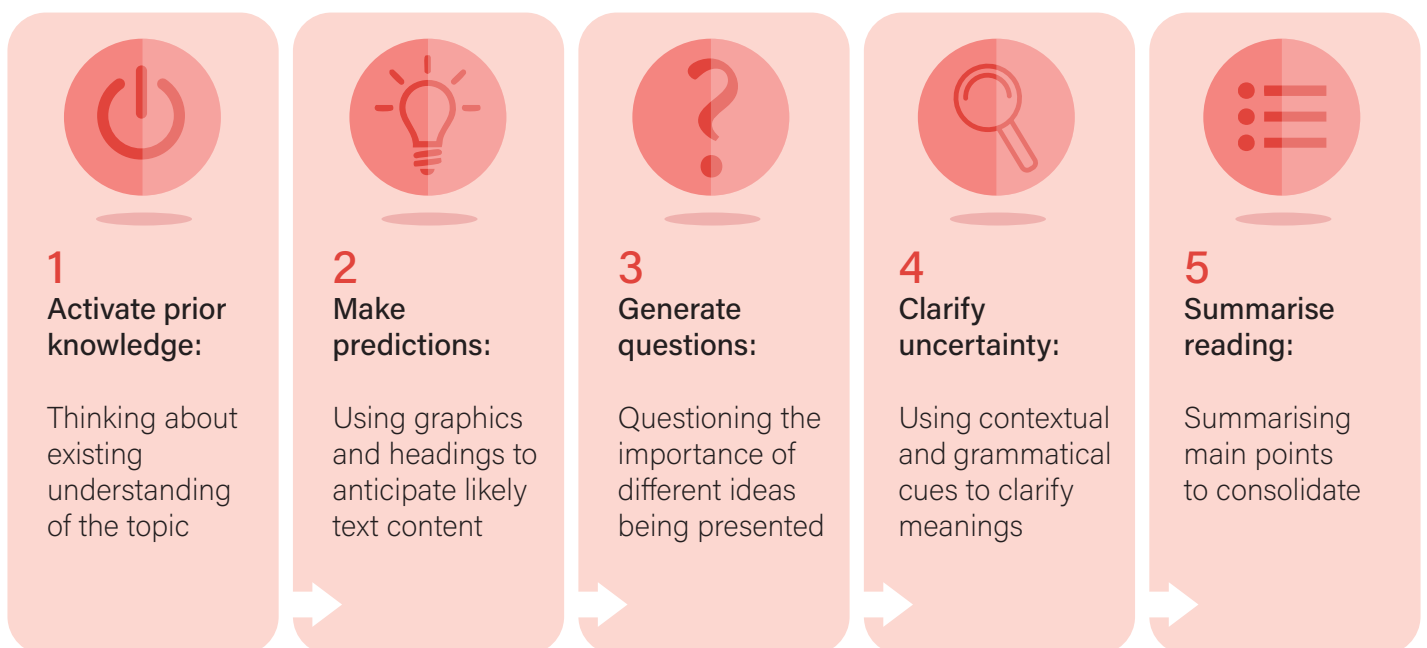


The Big Five reading strategies

4B – Use the Big Five reading strategies to aid comprehension

The five strategies below can be modelled and practised in the classroom to help pupils become more strategic readers. The EEF Toolkit³ identifies these strategies as likely to support pupils' comprehension of academic texts.

What are the Big Five?



Reference:

³ Education Endowment Foundation, *Teaching learning toolkit, Reading comprehension strategies*

The Big Five reading strategies

Reading informational texts at GCSE

Read this text and consider its challenges to pupils.

Why Zoos are Good

The days of the Victorian menagerie* are over, but modern zoos are much more than a collection of animals and more important than ever.

I am a lifelong fan of good zoos (note the adjective) and have visited dozens of zoos, safari parks and aquaria around the world. I also spent a number of years working as a volunteer keeper at two zoos in the U.K. So it is probably fair to say I'm firmly in the pro-zoo camp.

However, I am perfectly willing to recognise that there are bad zoos and bad individual exhibits. Not all animals are kept perfectly, much as I wish it were otherwise, and even in the best examples, there is still be room for improvement. But just as the fact that some police are corrupt does not mean we should not have people to enforce the law, although bad zoos or exhibits persist does not mean they are not worthwhile institutes. It merely means we need to pay more attention to the bad and improve them or close them. In either case, zoos (at least in the U.K. and most of the western world) are generally a poor target for criticism in terms of animal welfare – they have to keep the public onside or go bust and they have to stand up to rigorous inspections or be closed down. While a bad collection should not be ignored, if you are worried the care and treatment of animals in captivity I can point to a great many farms, breeders, dealers and private owners who are in far greater need of inspection, improvement or both.

Source: Dr David Hone

This extract is a typical example of a non-fiction source pupils may face in their GCSE English Language exam. It is also the kind of text we want pupils to be able to read outside of school to help build their knowledge of the world. In this exam pupils are tasked to:

- read the source, which is usually over a page, independently, in about seven minutes
- summarise its main points
- analyse language

- understand its perspective and compare it with another source from the 19th Century, with about seven minutes to read
- they then answer four questions of increasing weight and difficulty in the remaining 45 minutes.

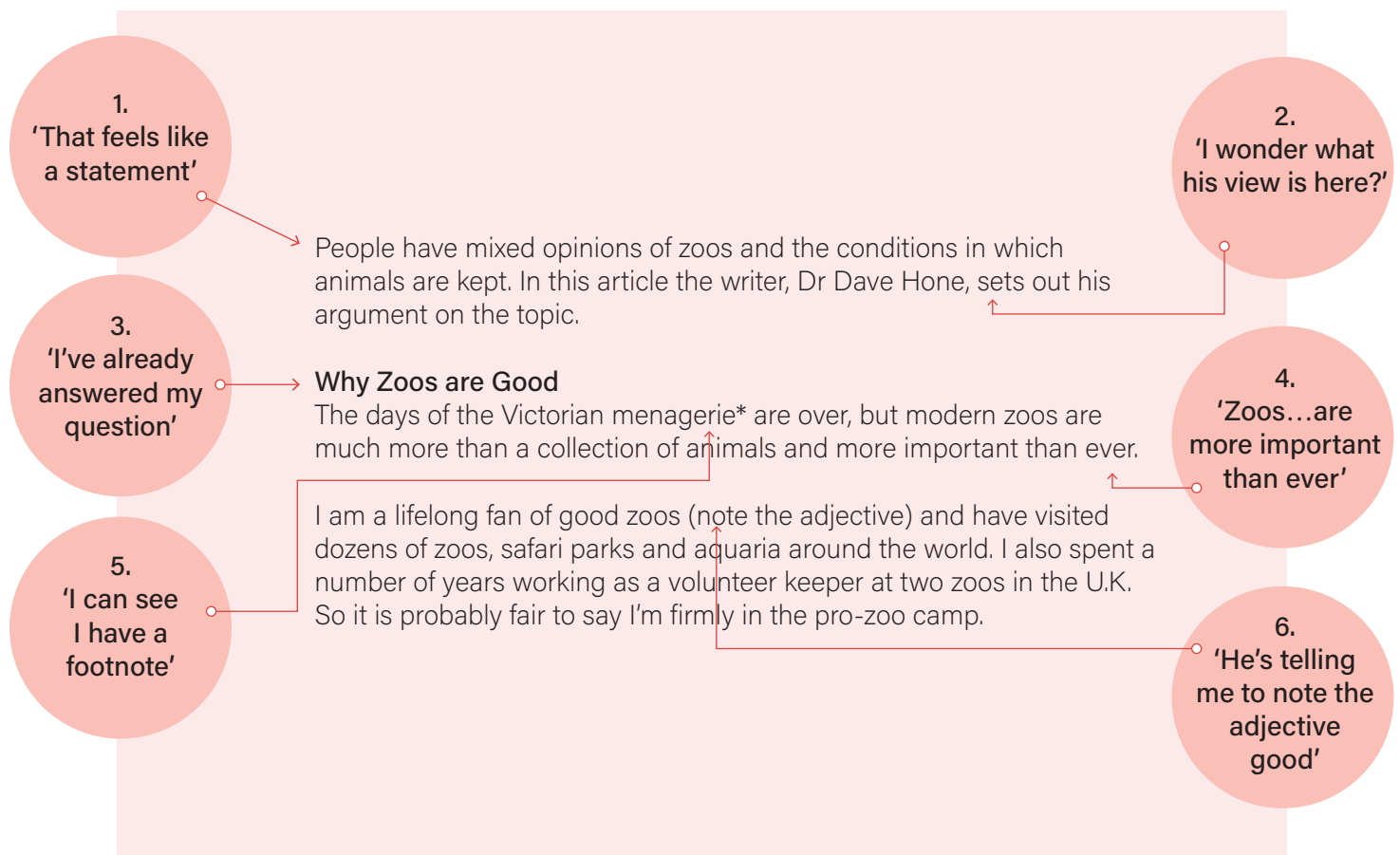
The criteria of exam questions are one thing. Reading and understanding such a text, before considering perspective, language, attitude, is another.

The Big Five reading strategies

Modelling the Big Five

We can deploy *Check Link Connect* questioning here to aid comprehension, and to enable pupils to access the texts we teach in lessons. But when reading these texts, we also need to guide pupils towards using the Big Five, so that they can become more strategic readers and tackle such difficult texts more independently.

When reading texts in the classroom, we might model, through metacognitive talk, these strategies like this:



The Big Five reading strategies

Metacognitive talk: examples

1. *'That feels like a statement. It's telling me the article will focus on the varied conditions of zoos. I know that zoos are popular but some might be considered cruel.'* This is an example of **Activate prior knowledge** where we might use our background knowledge of zoos in order to predict the focus of the article.

2. *'I wonder what his view is here? The word 'argument' tells me he has an opinion and his title Dr. suggests he is an authority on the subject.'* Here, **Generate questions** is appropriate as something is left open, but it is based on our knowledge triggered from the previous sentence.

3. *'I've already answered my question. The title clearly tells me the writer thinks zoos are good.'* Certain points in a text, like here at the heading, or at the end of paragraphs, are good points to **Clarify uncertainty**. By clarifying the writer's point of view, we can read the text with more of a focus, and look for reasons as to why he thinks zoos are good.

4. *'Zoos are more important than ever. This seems to be the main point here. I'm assuming there will be further arguments as to why zoos are necessary.'* We want to guide pupils to **Summarise** the main points of whole texts, but also at key points, such as at the end of paragraphs in order to keep track of our understanding. This can then be combined with the teaching of making annotations or notes while reading.

5. *'I can see I have a footnote. I did wonder what this word meant, so I'll refer to the footnotes at the end to get a proper understanding of its meaning.'* This (like many of these strategies) might seem unnecessary to draw pupils' attention to, but it is something many pupils are unlikely to look at if we do not. Explicit teaching of what they are, what they are for, and modelling our own use of them as a way to **Activate prior knowledge**, is crucial.

6. *'He's telling me to note the adjective good. I wonder why? The brackets, parenthesis, draws my attention to it so it seems important. It suggests that there are zoos which are not good, which is part of his argument in the following paragraph.'* Here, we might combine strategies. We have had to **Activate prior knowledge** of grammar in terms of word class and parentheses, in order to **Generate questions** about its function, and **Make predictions** about the likely content, in this case, the different arguments the writer uses about the benefits of zoos.

The purpose of all of this is to make the often hidden, implicit skills that expert readers use more visible and explicit, so that pupils can practise them and make them part of their own repertoire.