

Supporting reading in the Secondary classroom

Authors

Phil Stock – Director, Greenshaw Research School.
Deputy Head, Greenshaw High School

Steve Trafford – Deputy Director, Greenshaw Research School.
Head of English, Greenshaw High School

Sarah Murray – Assistant Director, Greenshaw Research School.
Assistant Head, Holmleigh Park High School

Johnny Richards – Assistant Director, Greenshaw Research School.
Deputy Head of English, Greenshaw High School

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Research School

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Supporting reading in the Secondary classroom – an introduction

Why reading?

Reading is a highly complex skill with many overlapping components. Successful readers are able to execute these components with speed and automaticity, seamlessly drawing upon their own knowledge of words and the world to comprehend the texts they read. However, with this complexity comes many challenges. Lot of pupils face a number of barriers when they read, and if not properly supported, only fall further behind their peers over time.

We know that reading ability correlates strongly with GCSE success across all subjects: this is as true in Maths and Science as it is in English and History¹. We also know that pupils who leave school without good literacy skills are likely to have poorer outcomes in health, wellbeing, employment and finance². As educators then, we must make reading a priority.

What happens with reading at Secondary school?

As pupils transition from Primary to Secondary, they experience a sharp jump in the level of reading challenge. Texts become more formal, more dense with challenging vocabulary, and use more complex syntax. What is more, words begin to take on slightly different meanings as pupils move around the school into the many different subject domains.

Teachers must understand the barriers pupils face in the Secondary context, and know the best ways to support them to overcome these.

References

¹ *Read all about it: Why reading is key to GCSE success by GL Assessments*

² *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools Guidance Report, EEF, 2021*

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What does the evidence say?

The EEF's *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools Guidance Report* synthesises a range of evidence on reading, and provides recommendations on how schools can support their pupils to read successfully.

Chief among these is the recommendation to develop pupils' ability to read complex academic texts, through strategies such as activating prior knowledge, questioning, summarising and more. This acknowledges that as pupils progress through the education system, reading becomes the primary vehicle for building academic knowledge.

What is the purpose of this resource?

The resource aims to provide concrete, practical strategies that teachers can use to support their pupils in reading texts across the whole curriculum.

Pupils' reading progress can be thought of as a virtuous circle: if we continually create the conditions for pupils to successfully read challenging texts, they will, over time, build their vocabulary and background knowledge, and their reading will improve.

While the strategies are designed to support pupils reading *this* text in *this* lesson, we also have an eye on helping pupils to become more independent, strategic readers who can navigate difficult texts on their own.



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What types of classroom reading does this resource aim to support?

While the strategies in this resource will support the reading of any texts, we are primarily thinking about 'content reading'. That is, informational texts that are used to build knowledge in each subject. For example, a text about World War 1 in History, Coastal Erosion in Geography, or Magnetism in Science. We also refer to prose fiction texts that would be used in English lessons or Tutor Reading.

How is the resource structured?

The resource is divided into three sections: before, during and after reading. Each section comprises nine strategies, focused on three separate areas.

→ **Before reading**, teachers should prepare texts and identify supporting tools, as well as identifying challenging vocabulary to pre-teach. They should also plan to check and activate pupils' prior knowledge so that they can draw upon this when reading the text.

→ **During reading**, teachers should model fluent reading and comprehension strategies giving pupils opportunities to practise these independently. They should also ask questions designed to scaffold pupils' understanding and help them build a mental model while they read.

→ **After reading**, teachers should give pupils structured opportunities to summarise and discuss reading, as well as checking their understanding and their use of key strategies. They should also give them the chance to reflect on the success of their reading and the challenges they faced, aiming to make pupils more aware of the effective ways they can approach complex texts.

Our resource also contains guidance on effective vocabulary teaching at different stages of the reading. An appendix contains 40 common word roots that can be taught across the curriculum to develop pupils' word-consciousness, and their ability to learn new words for themselves.

→ See the next page for our breakdown of how to support pupils' reading



Stage: Before

The Pupil	The Teacher	In Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask questions about the text or topic ▪ Activate prior knowledge ▪ Make predictions 	<p>1. Attend to where pupils are in their learning so that reading is building on solid foundations.</p> <p>2. Plan what you are going to say and to which pupils so that explanations and questions are clear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Check prior knowledge and vocabulary necessary to access the text. b. Pre-teach vocabulary and subject knowledge to access main ideas. c. Set clear objectives for the reading eg find evidence, understand reasons.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Script technical subject vocabulary and metacognitive strategies to be used. b. Craft short, crisp explanations of selected 'fingertip' words and phrases. c. Write comprehension and inference questions to check/build understanding.
	<p>3. Prepare what you are going to use to support reading so that pupils have the tools to help them be successful.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Get texts ready for teaching eg headings, formatting, cohesion devices. b. Identify supporting tools & resources eg paired texts, prompts, word banks. c. Design appropriate graphic organisers eg diagrams, images, overviews.



How to support pupils' reading comprehension in the classroom

Stage: During

The Pupil	The Teacher	In Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask questions to check understandingMake connectionsVisualise the textUpdate predictions	<p>4. Model subject-specific and general strategies so that pupils learn how successful readers make meaning.</p> <p>5. Explain necessary vocabulary so that pupils can access challenging texts now and in the future.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Read with fluency <i>and</i> provide opportunities for pupils to practise theirs.Use the Big Five strategic approaches to aid reading comprehension.Model strategies that develop independence eg annotation, note-taking.
	<p>6. Question in a structured way so that pupils can build situation models and comprehend the text.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Define 'fingertip' words and general vocabulary with short explanations that maintain the flow.Teach academic words and subject terminology using vocabulary principles.Use etymology and morphology to help pupils learn words for themselves.
		<ol style="list-style-type: none">Ask <i>Check</i> questions to ensure pupils can identify basic factual details.Ask <i>Link</i> questions to support pupils to understand ideas within the text.Ask <i>Connect</i> questions to help pupils relate to ideas outside of the text.



How to support pupils' reading comprehension in the classroom

Stage: After

The Pupil	The Teacher	In Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Summarise the textRevisit predictionsGenerate further questionsEvaluate reading goals	<p>7. Check what pupils have understood so that their next steps in improving reading can be identified.</p> <p>8. Consolidate so that pupils can integrate the new learning with their existing understanding.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Set short quizzes or tasks that check pupils' understanding.Review books for understanding and evidence of metacognitive strategies.Give pupils prompts to reflect on the difficulties and challenges they faced.
	<p>9. Feedback success so that pupils can evaluate their comprehension and identify next steps for improvement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Give pupils structured written tasks that help them summarise main ideas.Provide scaffolded oral opportunities for pupils to discuss understanding.Set <i>sponge</i> tasks to develop depth of new vocabulary knowledge.
		<ol style="list-style-type: none">Give class and/or individual feedback focusing on next steps for learning.Feed back on the strategies used to aid comprehension eg making notes.Celebrate examples of pupils who have used the strategies successfully.