

“Reading Comprehension Strategies” by Dr. David W. Moore

**If you ask proficient readers** how they make sense of print, you might get replies such as:

- “ Sometimes I make movies in my mind. I use my imagination to make what I’m reading come to life.”
- “ I figure out what the author doesn’t just come right out and say. This way I can get what’s happening behind the scene.”
- “ When I need to learn what I’m reading about, I take notes.”
- “ ‘How is this like what I already know?’ That’s the question I ask when I want to stay really focused on what I’m reading.”

As these statements suggest, proficient readers use their minds actively to build meaning. They read purposefully and selectively. Whether they are reading for pleasure, to acquire new knowledge, or to perform a task, proficient readers use strategies to achieve their goals (Kintsch, 1998; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

In high school, adolescents might be reading short stories like “Amigo Brothers” or lengthier nonfiction like “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman.” To get a head start in understanding such works, proficient readers preview the text then approach it with an appropriate mindset. They continually connect what they already know with what they are reading. When all is going well, these youths’ mental processes are functioning skillfully and automatically, with little conscious attention.

## **Robust Reading Strategies:**

### **The Big 7**

When proficient readers get confused or off track, they realize this right away then consciously shift mental gears and apply appropriate strategies. They might identify the source of the confusion, reread it, and then explain it to themselves. They might knowingly make connections to fill in what the author leaves unsaid. And they might record important ideas and information, form sensory images, or ask themselves questions. Adolescent readers benefit from robust, general strategies that can be applied to a range of situations (Alexander & Jetton, 2000).

Along with having a repertoire of general strategies, proficient readers know how to adjust these strategies according to the particular texts and tasks at hand. For instance, readers continually make inferences to comprehend texts, but the specific types of inference vary (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). When reading imaginative fiction, readers make inferences to interpret characters’ motivations; when reading scientific exposition, readers make inferences to link technical details.

Edge presents seven general strategies known to promote adolescents’ reading comprehension. The strategies are ones that proficient readers use regularly and across a wide variety of texts:

- **Plan and Monitor:** controlling one’s mental activities; it is metacognitive in nature, centering about readers’ awareness and control of their comprehension. When engaged with this strategy, youth are taught planning skills—how to preview texts and how to set a purpose for reading and make predictions. They are also taught how to clarify ideas by

using fix-up strategies and how to clarify vocabulary by using context clues and other word-level fix-up strategies.

- **Determine Importance:** identifying essential ideas and information. This is the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff in text. Youth are taught how to identify stated and implied main ideas, how to summarize texts, and how to note the personal relevance of ideas and information.
- **Ask Questions:** interrogating texts for a variety of purposes, such as checking one's understanding, querying the author about his or her writing, and discerning relationships among ideas and information within a text
- **Make Inferences:** linking parts of texts that authors did not link explicitly. Using what one already knows to form links across sentences and paragraphs. Often known as "reading between the lines."
- **Make Connections:** using what is known to enrich authors' meanings; taking what has been learned from one's own life experiences, other texts, and cultural and global matters to deepen understandings of what the author presents. Otherwise known as "reading beyond the lines."
- **Synthesize:** putting together ideas from multiple sources; deciding how ideas go together in a way that is new; figuring out how what one is reading and learning fits together in a way not thought of before. Youth are taught how to draw conclusions, form generalizations, and make comparisons across texts.
- **Visualize:** forming sensory and emotional images of textual contents, especially visual images. This strategy also includes an aspect specifically for teens who don't consider themselves to be readers: the strategy of recognizing that one is having an emotional response while reading and to identify what the author did to invoke that response.

This set of seven is based on the reading comprehension strategy research that has been reviewed at length since the early 1990s (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) and especially the research that embraces adolescents (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Alvermann, Fitzgerald, & Simpson, 2006). There is striking agreement that low-achieving adolescent readers improve their comprehension performance when they learn to apply strategies. This improvement has been demonstrated among adolescent native English speakers as well as adolescent English language learners who struggle with reading (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).