Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults

First Steps for Teachers

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The Partnership for Reading

Developed by:

National Center for Family Literacy

2005

PRINCIPLE 10

Fluency may be taught using approaches that include the repeated reading of passages of text, words from texts, and other text units (Kruidenier, 2002).

An idea from the children's research: To improve ABE readers' fluency (as well as word recognition and reading comprehension achievement), use repeated guided oral reading procedures (Kruidenier).

What Kind of Fluency Instruction is Most Effective?

Research suggests that *guided repeated oral reading* may improve one or more aspects of fluency as well as comprehension (NICHD, 2000, p. 3-28). These approaches call for the learner to read a passage several times, with guidance, until an acceptable level of fluency is reached, at which point she begins work on another passage at the same or a slightly higher level of difficulty.

Guidance may involve any of the following:

- Modeling—teacher or audiotape-assisted
- Simultaneous reading
- Assistance and correction
- Combinations of these options

Approaches to guided repeated oral reading

No one approach to guided repeated oral reading has been demonstrated to be consistently more effective than others. Several are described below.

Reading to the teacher or tutor. The learner reads a brief passage aloud, and the teacher or tutor provides help as needed to identify problem words. The teacher may also ask a couple of recall questions after the reading. Then the learner reads the passage aloud again one or more times, continuing until he can read it comfortably with few errors and can recall facts and details accurately. By engaging the reader in discussion and asking comprehension questions after each reading, the teacher maintains a focus on meaning and demonstrates to the learner that re-reading not only increases accuracy, but also results in better understanding. When fluency is achieved with one passage, the learner begins working on another one. In a slight variation on this approach, the teacher begins the session by reading the passage aloud before asking the learner to read.

Echo reading. The teacher or tutor reads a sentence aloud and the learner reads the same sentence immediately afterward, imitating the teacher's phrasing. They proceed through the text this way. Then the learner may attempt re-reading the text aloud independently. As an alternative, echo reading may be used as an additional level of support during other guided repeated reading procedures. For instance, when the learner finishes reading a passage aloud, the teacher may use echo reading with selected phrases or sentences that were especially challenging for the learner.

Dyad and choral reading. In dyad reading the teacher or tutor and learner read a passage or story aloud in unison. At any point, if the learner is reading comfortably, she may offer to read alone or the teacher may simply stop reading. If the learner begins to struggle or miscalls one or more words that have significance for the meaning of the passage, the teacher resumes reading. The teacher's role is to provide a model for fluent, expressive reading and to provide any words the learner can't quickly identify. They might practice this way for a few minutes during each class meeting, continuing to re-read the passage until the learner is reading accurately and smoothly, perhaps to a predetermined

standard for word errors (miscues) and/or reading speed. They would then begin work on another passage, gradually increasing the readability level of the material. The teacher may also ask comprehension questions after each reading.

In choral reading, a group of learners reads aloud in unison.

Paired or partner reading. Pairs of learners take turns reading and re-reading the same passage to each other, or they read aloud together as in dyad reading above. Learners may be similar in reading fluency or one may be deliberately paired with a better reader so he can provide assistance.

Tape-assisted reading. Using taped readings, a learner is able to work more independently, reading along while listening to the passage on tape. This could be done during class time or at home. Sometimes the learner is instructed to listen and read the passage a set number of times (usually at least three). Alternatively, the direction might be to re-read until she feels able to read it accurately and comfortably. The teacher might use commercial books on tape or make recordings of texts or authentic materials.

Performance reading. A class or group of learners practices reading a text to prepare for performance of a poem, play, or story. Because of its rhythm, poetry requires a measure of fluency to be appreciated, and a proper, expressive reading may require repeated readings (Rasinski, 2000). Poetry provides a natural, authentic reason to reread, and adults often enjoy modern poetry (Strucker, 1997a). Adults also may find children's poetry amusing, and those who are parents might enjoy preparing to share a poem with their children.

Learners also might use performance reading to present the findings of a project or problem they have studied together, selecting text from different sources to illustrate important facts or concepts. They might divide up sections or roles and practice reading their parts aloud to each other and the teacher. They also might tape their readings so each reader can assess his delivery and make improvements. Performances like these give learners a *real* reason to re-read text.

Cross-generational reading. As a variation on performance reading, parents might prepare to read to their children by re-reading stories with a teacher's assistance or a tape recording. (This activity is most appropriate for parents who find reading age-appropriate children's books sufficiently challenging to benefit from fluency practice. If they have very young children, appropriate stories may be too easy for many parents, and re-reading such material is therefore less likely to result in fluency gains.)

An idea from research with children: Use systematic phonics instruction (as opposed to non-systematic or incidental phonics instruction) to improve adult beginning readers' reading fluency (Kruidenier, 2002).

Phonics instruction and decoding practice

If word identification is part of the fluency problem, phonics instruction may make a difference. The teacher uses assessments to identify learners' specific decoding problems, and then provides focused, systematic instruction in phonics and/or sight word recognition.

Issues in fluency instruction

When you begin planning for fluency development, you will find several issues need to be resolved.

Appropriate difficulty level of materials. When choosing reading materials for fluency practice, how do you decide on the difficulty level? For fluency practice aimed at building speed and improving phrasing and expression, some authors suggest using material at the learner's *independent reading level*, to minimize word identification problems. If, however, you also want to work on the word-reading aspect of fluency, you may want a passage that is somewhat difficult—at the *instructional reading level*—so the learner gets decoding practice as well as work on the other aspects of fluency. As fluency improves you should increase the difficulty of reading material.

Text readability. You can calculate the reading grade level of any passage using a simple readability formula. (See Appendix C.) Your computer word processing program also may evaluate text for readability. If you are using commercial textbooks written to grade-level specifications as a source for oral reading passages, you might still check the readability with a formula, because materials may vary from one publisher to another. Once you have located a number of passages at different reading levels, you can match materials to each learner's assessed level.

If you have only a silent reading comprehension score from a standardized test, you should use it cautiously in this situation because such measures do not assess oral reading accuracy.

Learners' reading levels. The learner's oral reading level (grade equivalent) may be assessed with an informal reading inventory (IRI). Alternatively, if you are using passages from graded textbooks for fluency practice, you may simply have the learner try one or more sample passages and determine reading level based on word-reading accuracy. Of course you'll need a standard for defining levels, and these vary from one author to another. A conservative estimate would judge text to be at the learner's independent reading level if she is able to read it with 98-99% accuracy, or no more than two errors in 100 words. Instructional reading level may be defined as approximately 95-97% accuracy, or no more than five errors in 100 words. Then, depending on the focus of your practice activity (speed/expression or accuracy), you may choose an independent- or instructional-level passage.

Length of passage. There are no generally accepted guidelines, but time is a consideration. It is usually recommended that fluency practice should occupy only a small portion of each reading lesson, so you will need to choose passages that can be read aloud several times in a few minutes. Passages might range from 50 to 200 words, depending on the reading ability of the learner.

Type of text. This decision again depends not only on the reader's ability, but also on his goals and interests. In general, it makes sense to provide practice with various types of texts, including children's and adults' literature, samples taken from workbooks and other classroom materials, as well as authentic materials adults need to read outside of class.

Audiotapes. You may use commercial books-on-tape for this activity. However, these products are not intended as instructional aids, and the reader may read more quickly than an adult learner can follow. Tape players with variable-speed playback may solve this problem. Another option is to create your own tapes of selected passages. If you do this, you can provide support for the reader, reading slowly, for instance (while still modeling phrasing and expression), and signaling (perhaps by ringing a bell) at the end of a section or page.

Teacher assistance. How much help should you provide? When and how should you correct errors? One guideline for correcting miscues is to refrain from stepping in unless the reader makes an error that affects meaning. It's also a good idea to allow the reader a few seconds to identify the word or correct a mistake. Then you may provide the word—or a phonic cue if you think the learner should be able to figure it out. But you probably should not choose this moment to teach or review a phonics rule. In general, you want to avoid interrupting the flow (Strucker, 1997a). (However, you might ask the learner to re-read a phrase or sentence after correcting a word.)

Silent reading. Most people perform better in oral reading when they read silently first. You may want to encourage learners to read a passage silently before reading it aloud. After all, repeated reading activities are intended as learning and practice opportunities, not assessment tasks. Silent reading may allow time to identify words that might cause a reader to stumble, and also give her time to decide on the grouping of words into phrases. Figuring out when to pause and how to group are important decisions and readers don't always do it right the first time.

Fluency standards. You may ask, "How long does one continue to re-read a passage? Are we aiming for perfection? How fluent is fluent enough?" There seem to be no generally acceptable standards. And of course, fluency has three different aspects: speed, accuracy, and expression. So you may need more than one kind of standard.

Regarding speed, it's hard to say what's fluent enough. Reading rate guidelines for children at different grade levels may not apply to adult learners.

If you're working on accuracy, you probably have chosen a slightly difficult passage to build decoding skills. You might use independent reading level as your target, so that reading with 98-99% accuracy is the aim. At that point, you move to the next level passages. However, this is a high standard, and the learner might find the number of repetitions required to be unacceptable, so you might need to lower your expectations.

You might also use one of the fluency scoring rubrics to judge phrasing and expression (see References, Pinnell, *et al.*, 1995 and Allington, 1983), and then set your sights on an improved rating.

Of course, since this is not a high-stakes decision, perhaps teacher and learner judgment will suffice: If you and the learner are comfortable with the progress made and ready for a little more challenging material, you might try the next level.

1. COMPREHENSION MONITORING

These strategies are intended to develop meta-cognitive abilities in readers, that is, to help them think about their own thinking. Using these techniques, readers learn how to (1) actively monitor their understanding, (2) identify specific problems when comprehension breaks down, and (3) take steps to solve their comprehension problems.

You might try one or more of the following techniques. Most are broadly applicable to any kind of continuous text and various reading purposes.

Thinking aloud. One way to teach adults how good readers monitor their understanding is to show them how you do it. In other words, this technique is both a strategy for readers and an instructional approach you can use with any of the other comprehension strategies as well.

Here's how it works: You read a passage to the learners and think aloud about how you process the information (Davey, 1983; Kibby, n.d.). When you run into problems, you express your confusion and talk through your thinking as you solve the problems. Following are examples of strategies you might demonstrate:

- Stopping to reread or restate a difficult section
- Summarizing long sentences or other bits of text and putting them in your own words
- Looking back in the text to locate the person or thing that a pronoun refers to
- Identifying important or not-so-important information
- Using various strategies to identify or determine the meaning of an unknown word

Example

Teacher reads aloud (in italics) and thinks aloud (in brackets).

There were three main causes for the uprising.
[OK, I'll be looking for three causes.]

First and most important was the economic situation in the country.
[That's number one, the economic situation.]

(Reading on—further details)
There was also a popular movement gaining strength that centered on a young leader, etc.
[Is that number two? Hmm, I'm not sure. I'd better read on to check.]

(Reading on)
It's clear the uprising was rooted in recent, if not ancient history, as explained by journalist Browne, etc.
[Wait a minute. This is almost the end. Did I miss the third cause? I guess I had better read it again.]

(Rereading)
The chaos surrounding the earthquake and concern about the nation's ability to repair and rebuild contributed to the unrest.
[I wonder if this is it. It seems pretty different from the other two. I think that's it. I'll read on and see if I get any other clues. Maybe the writer has more to say about the three causes later on.]

After you demonstrate your thinking processes you can ask the learners to practice thinking aloud, too, to make them more conscious of their understanding and their thinking processes.

1. COMPREHENSION MONITORING (CONTINUED)

Restating. You can teach learners to stop periodically (after each section, for example) and try to restate what's been read in their own words. If they have trouble with this, they know they're not getting it.

Asking questions. Another way they can monitor their understanding is to ask themselves *who, what, when, where,* and *why* questions after each section or page. If they can't answer these questions they know to stop and reread. (Be aware that this strategy may work best with stories, news articles, and other narrative texts because they are likely to have all the "5 Ws" represented.)

Coding text. Readers are actively engaged with the content when they make notes as they read. You can teach a simple shorthand/code that allows the reader to make quick responses to the text. If writing in a book is not an option, learners can use small adhesive notes. The INSERT system is one example of such a code (Vaughn & Estes, 1986). It may be especially helpful as a study strategy.

Interactive Notation System for Effective Reading and Thinking (INSERT)

=	I agree
X	I thought differently
+	New information
!	WOW
?	I don't get it
*****	I know this is important

Monitoring and repair strategies. You also may teach specific strategies for solving comprehension problems (Davey, 1983; Kibby, n.d.). You describe and demonstrate the different kinds of problems that can arise while reading. Then, taking them one at a time, teach appropriate repair strategies, by modeling, providing guided practice, and independent practice.

Examples of comprehension problems:

- I can't read this word.
- I don't know what this word means.
- I'm confused. I don't get it. This doesn't make sense. This doesn't fit with something I know (from an earlier part of the text or the reader's life experience).

Examples of repair strategies:

- **Problem—*I can't read this word.***

  Step 1: If it's a short word, try to sound it out. If it's longer, look for familiar rimes or syllables and put them together to sound it out. (Do you recognize the word? Does it make sense in the sentence? If yes, go on reading. If not, try step 2.)

  Step 2: Read to the end of the sentence and think of a word that makes sense. (Does this word match some of the letter sounds? If yes, go on reading, but make a note to check on the word later. If not, maybe you don't know the meaning of the word, and that's why you don't recognize it. Go to the next strategy.)

1. COMPREHENSION MONITORING (CONTINUED)

- **Problem—*I don't know what this word means.***

  Step 1: Read the sentence to the end and see if you can make a guess about the meaning based on context clues (the meaning of the words around it and the rest of the sentence). Hint: Use context clues to decide what kind of word it is. (Is it, for instance, an action word, a name of something, or a word that describes something?)

  Step 2: See if the word has any prefixes or suffixes you know or any familiar word parts. Try using those along with context clues to figure out the meaning.

  Step 3: If you can't make a good guess about the meaning from context, decide if you *must* understand this word to understand the text. If not, skip it but make a note to look it up in the dictionary later. If the word *is* important, look in the dictionary or ask someone.

▶ **Be aware that none of these repair strategies is foolproof. Some texts contain few useful context clues, and even prefixes are sometimes unhelpful or even misleading. For example, the prefix *pro* usually means before, forward, or for. Knowing this meaning doesn't help define the word *proportion*.**

- **Problem—*I'm confused. I don't get it. This doesn't make sense. This doesn't fit with something I know.***
  - – Reread the sentence or passage.
  - – Read on to see if it gets clearer.
  - – Try reading aloud.
  - – Look at the words in the confusing part. Maybe a word is being used in an unfamiliar way. Check the word(s) in the dictionary or ask someone.
  - – Talk about your problem with others.

▶ **Even common words have many uses. Pay attention to the words in instructional text and pre-teach words that are used in unfamiliar ways. If a reader encounters such a word that you haven't pre-taught, you may find this a good "teachable moment."**

2. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Graphic organizers are diagrams or charts that visually represent the relationship of ideas and information. Most often they are used to illustrate the organization and structure of a text.

Texts are structured in different ways. Stories often introduce a setting, main and supporting characters, a problem, a series of events, and a resolution of the problem, typically in approximately this order (though not always). Learners may find "story maps" helpful in following and remembering events and characters. (See section on story structure, page 86.)

A nonfiction piece may be organized around a sequence of chronological events. History texts, for example, often present events in time order. The purpose of the writing may dictate other structures. An article may be organized to make a persuasive argument, with a main thesis and supporting details, or to define or describe something, with the introduction of the topic followed by a series of examples. Graphic organizers may help readers to become familiar with these common text structures and to understand the flow of information and ideas within a particular structure.

Organizers are most often used with nonfiction, especially content-area texts like science and social studies, and adult learners may find graphic organizers most useful for analyzing and summarizing content they need to learn. However, graphic tools also are useful for other pre- and post-reading activities: activating prior knowledge, setting a purpose for reading, and keeping track of what is learned.

Teaching graphic organizers. You will want to select a graphic tool (see the following examples) that matches your instructional objective, and begin by demonstrating how to use it with an article or story the class has read. In a multi-level class you might try tape recording the material or reading it to the weaker readers so that everyone has experienced the same text and all are able to participate.

Be sure to start with a simple organizer: It should be a tool, not a source of frustration. Carefully explain the purpose of the tool and *when* to use it. Then have the whole group compose one, with individuals suggesting entries. The next steps might be to ask small groups or pairs to try using the organizer while you observe and assist. Groups should work with material they can read easily, or use a taped reading. Finally, when you see that learners are using the strategy correctly and comfortably, they can do it on their own. Following are examples of graphic organizers.

(Continued)

2. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS (CONTINUED)

- **KWL Chart** – Use the KWL chart to help learners think about what they already know about a topic (access prior knowledge) and develop a purpose for reading. It's also a review tool, when they make notes of what they've learned.

KWL Chart

Name: _____

Topic: _____

What I **K**now	What I **W**ant to Know: or What I **W**onder:	What I Have **L**earned:

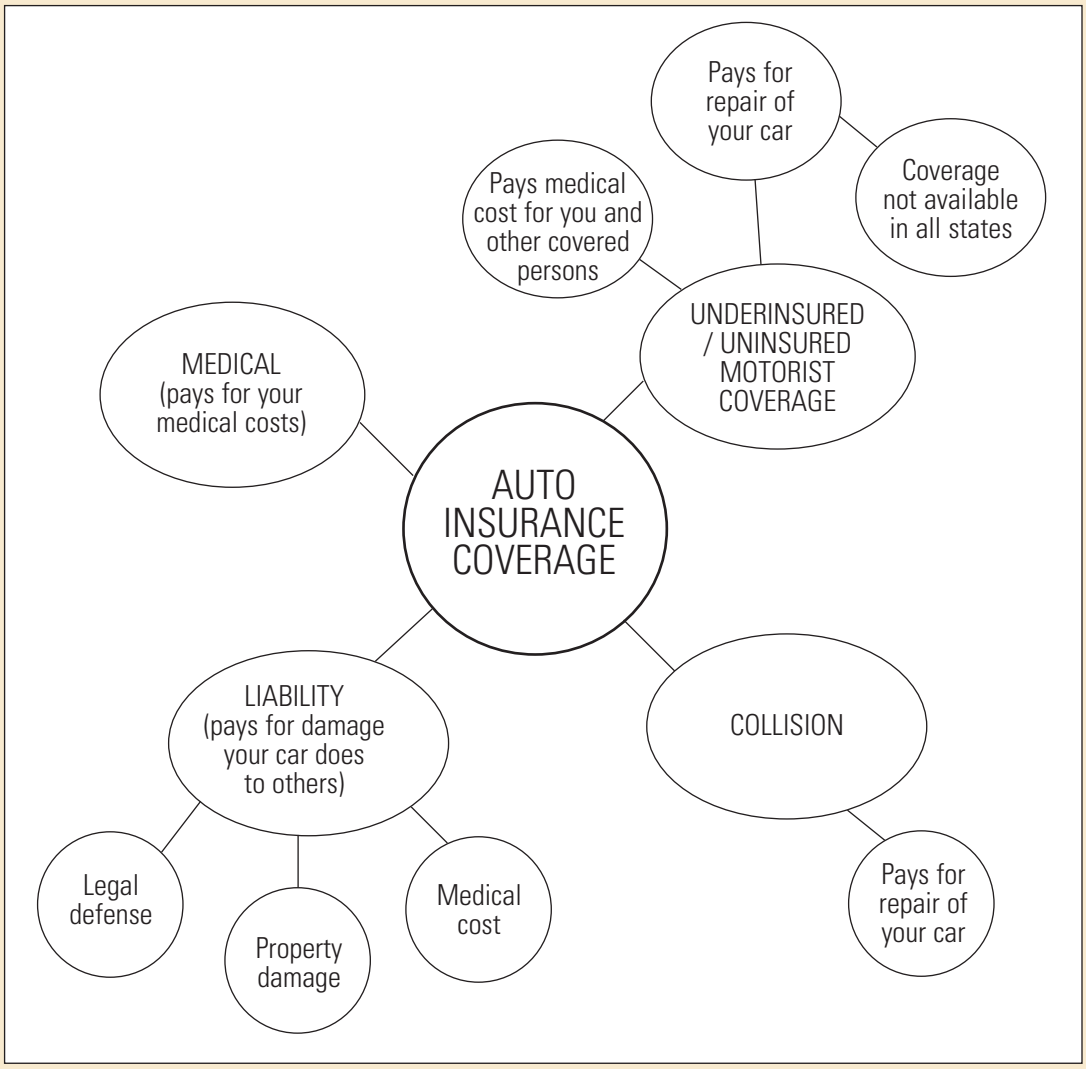
- **Tables** – A simple table may be used to illustrate various relationships: similarities and differences, inferences and text clues, or main ideas and supporting details.

MAIN IDEA

Detail
Detail
Detail
Detail

2. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS (CONTINUED)

- **Semantic Map/Web –** Use semantic mapping to illustrate a main idea and details, to review or summarize facts and concepts learned from reading about a topic, or to brainstorm and organize ideas before writing.



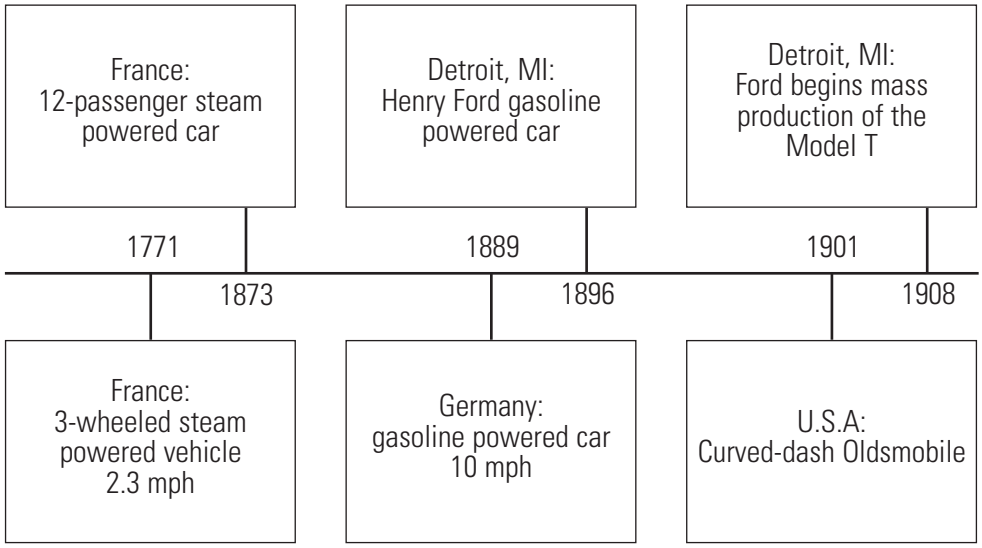
2. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS (CONTINUED)

- **Timelines –** A timeline illustrates events in order and may be useful in reading history or following events in a news or fictional story.

Children's Language Development				
Key Events	• Babbles • Laughs, giggles, cries • Makes noise when talked to	• Understands no-no • Babbles • Tries to repeat sounds	• Says first words • Understands simple directions • Points to people & objects	• Puts two or more words together • Pronounces most vowels and some consonants • Understands simple verbs, e.g., eat, sleep
Time	Birth to 5 months	6-11 months	12-17 months	18-23 months

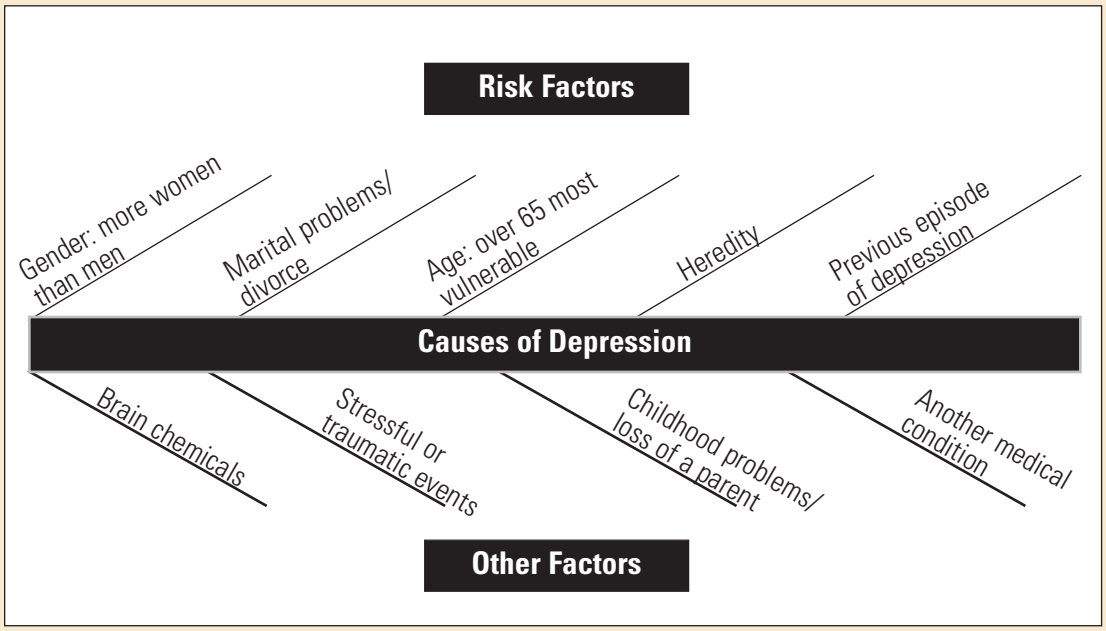
The timeline below shows how to arrange events so they don't take up too much horizontal space.

Invention of the Automobile



2. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS (CONTINUED)

- **Fishbone/Herringbone** – A fishbone/herringbone diagram may be used to show complex cause and effect relationships.



3. STORY STRUCTURE

The idea of teaching story structure is based on the fact that all stories have similar features and all have plots that are organized into episodes. By analyzing a story's structure, the reader becomes aware of the important story elements, and this awareness facilitates comprehension and memory.

To introduce this strategy you might begin with these five questions that represent the basic story elements (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-91).

1. Who is/are the main character(s)?
2. Where and when did the story occur?
3. What did the main character(s) do?
4. How did the story end?
5. How did the main character feel?

You should begin with a story the class has read and demonstrate the question-and-answer activity for them. Then the whole class might practice going through the process with another story. Learners also could practice this strategy in small groups or pairs.

To reinforce this kind of thinking and make it more concrete you could have the learners construct another kind of graphic organizer, a story map like the one below.

To make the analysis of story structure more concrete and explicit for struggling readers, you can have them read a story in sections (introduction, body, and conclusion), ask questions about main characters, and setting, record the answers on cards, and line up the cards under the appropriate story sections. Find details on this approach in *Teaching Adults Who Learn Differently* (Skinner, Gillespie, & Balkam, 1998).

Story Map

Title: _____

Setting
Characters
Problem

Event: _____

Event: _____

Event: _____

Event: _____

Resolution

4. QUESTION ANSWERING

This strategy is a modification or expansion of the time-honored approach to comprehension: asking questions. Teachers ask questions during or after learners' reading, and learners may look back at the text to get the answers if they need to.

The goal of question-answering instruction is to "aid students in learning to answer questions while reading and thus learn more from a text" (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-86). This strategy may be especially helpful for school-based learning and test taking, but when questions require higher-level thinking, adults also may apply this kind of thinking to a variety of reading tasks (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

To build higher-order thinking skills you have to ask good questions. Research suggests that if you mainly ask factual questions, readers will learn to focus mostly on facts when they read. On the other hand, if you ask questions that demand higher-level thinking and use of background knowledge in combination with textual information, they will tend to think this way when they read (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Of course, literal comprehension is vital; a reader can't make inferences and draw conclusions without control over the basic facts. Just don't stop there. Ask questions that require learners to think about their reading.

Teaching readers to make inferences. When readers make inferences they put information from different parts of the text together with their own knowledge to arrive at understandings that are not directly stated. Making inferences is sometimes called "reading between the lines."

This kind of thinking while reading doesn't come naturally to all learners, but it is important, and may be especially important for adults in basic education and literacy classes because their general knowledge in academic content areas may be limited. The less a reader knows about the subject matter of a text, the more inferences will be required. If a learner is reading a short article about the Civil War and doesn't have much background knowledge, he may have to infer (for example) that Robert E. Lee was an important leader of the southern army. This reader will have to work harder to figure out "who the players are" than another who knows more about the war.

Adult learners may not understand that readers are expected to make inferences about text. They may not realize that they should make inferences while reading as they do in listening. Explicit instruction may be required. Here is a possible sequence.

1. Begin by defining *inference* and explaining why reading between the lines is necessary for full comprehension.
2. Then use a scenario based on everyday life to illustrate how we all make inferences every day. You might tell this story, for instance,

   "People these days stay pretty active even when they get up in years. Yesterday I stepped into the hall to put out some bills for the mailman before the holiday, and I saw my elderly neighbor walking toward the building carrying two big grocery bags. Another neighbor stepped up to help her, and as they came into the building, I overheard them

4. QUESTION ANSWERING (CONTINUED)

talking. The older woman said, 'Would you look at all this food! And I had to buy such a big turkey! I haven't cooked one in years. I hope I remember how!'"

Then ask the learners, "What do you think is about to happen?" (The older woman is probably having company for a holiday dinner.) "Where do you think these people live?" (They probably live in an apartment building.)

Be sure to ask, "What makes you think so? What clues did you use?"

Explain that as readers we figure out things that are not directly stated by using exactly the same kind of thinking they just used in listening: We use our knowledge of the world or of the subject matter.

3. Model the thinking process by reading a passage to the group and thinking aloud, demonstrating how you make inferences. Be sure to point out the text clues that support your inferences. Here's an example from the Partnership for Reading booklet for parents, *A Child Becomes a Reader: Birth Through Preschool.*

   The following is a list of some accomplishments that you can expect for your child by age 5. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard and fast rules. (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p. 25)

   Here is one way to demonstrate what a parent might infer from this passage:

   "It seems like the list that's coming up will tell some things that 5-year-olds can do. I guess that's what they mean by 'accomplishments that you can expect.' But it says children are all different, and I'm the best judge of my child, so I think that means I shouldn't be upset if my child can't do everything on the list."

4. Next ask pairs or groups to read a passage and discuss their inferences. Be sure they specify the clues (evidence) they used, and encourage them to challenge each other if the evidence seems insufficient to justify the conclusion. Observe and assist the groups if they need help finding these "invisible messages" (Campbell, 2003).

4. QUESTION ANSWERING (CONTINUED)

5. Have individuals practice with another text, and complete a table like the one below (Campbell, 2003), writing information from the text in the left column and the corresponding inference on the right.

Text Cues	Invisible Message
1. Accomplishments you can expect	Things most 5-year-olds can do
2. Children don't learn and develop at the same pace.	My child may not do everything on the list– or may do more things.
3. Guidelines, not hard and fast rules	Children vary. I shouldn't be upset if my child doesn't match the guidelines.
4.	4.

6. Provide feedback on this activity and more practice as needed.

Analyzing questions. After explicitly teaching this kind of thinking, you may teach learners to analyze questions to see where and how to find the answers. You might try the question-answer relationship (QAR) approach (Raphael & McKinney; Raphael & Pearson, as cited in Duke & Pearson, 2002). Three QARs may be taught:

- *Right There* questions, when the answer is directly stated in the text,
- *Think and Search* questions, when the reader must do some searching—combining information from different parts of the text, and
- *On My Own* questions, when the question requires the use of prior knowledge combined with text information.

Analyzing questions in this way helps readers know how to find the answers.

Answering questions may be understood as the foundation for generating questions, the next strategy. Before you can expect readers to ask good questions of themselves, you have to give them examples of different kinds of questions (Curtis & Longo, 1999). It makes sense to first focus on questions *you* ask. Then, when the learners are aware of different kinds of questions and have practiced finding answers, you might try the question generating strategy, modeling as in the example on page 92.

5. QUESTION GENERATING

This strategy requires learners to ask and answer questions about their reading. "The assumption is that readers will learn more and construct better memory representations when self-questions are asked while reading" (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-89).

As active readers we're thinking while we're reading, asking questions and seeking the answers—although we may not articulate the questions. If you pay attention to your thoughts, you may discover that when you are having a "comprehension breakdown" you ask questions like these:

- What's going on here?
- Why did the character say that?
- Why is the author so emphatic about this point?
- Why did the author include this information? What's the connection with the last section?
- What's the difference between this plan and the old one?
- How does this information fit with the article I read yesterday? Are the two authors saying different things? How could the ideas be reconciled?

When you become aware of your own questioning you can model this process by thinking aloud with different kinds of texts: asking questions and demonstrating how you find the answers. You could use QAR analysis again here, thinking about where the answers might be found. Be sure to plan this activity carefully to include examples of different kinds of questions so you can show the different strategies for finding answers.

For example, some of the questions above could be answered by reading on and perhaps using inference to draw a conclusion. Some would require looking back to other parts of the text to recall events in a story or to review information. Still others may require other sources. Sometimes reading raises questions that require further reading.

The question-generating strategy may be used in reading both fiction and nonfiction texts. By showing learners how to be questioners and encouraging them to analyze their questions to decide where the answers may be found, you are helping them to become active readers and thinkers. Research with children offers strong evidence that this strategy improves reading comprehension, as reflected in specific tasks: remembering what is read, answering questions based on the text, and identifying main ideas through summarization (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-88).

As a next step, analyzing questions may be a good skill to transfer to real-life reading tasks. When adults need to read something because they have questions, using this strategy may be helpful, because they figure out where the answers to different kinds of questions may be found. What kind of question is it? Does the notice or manual or letter have all the answers in it, or is it necessary to get more information? They could formulate their own questions and analyze them: deciding for each one if it's a *Right There,* a *Think and Search,* or an *On My Own* question. Then they could read to find answers and check back afterward to see if their analysis was correct.

6. SUMMARIZATION

A summary is "a brief statement that contains the essential ideas of a longer passage or selection" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 247). According to the National Reading Panel report, the aim of summarization instruction is "to teach the reader to identify the main or central ideas of a paragraph or a series of paragraphs" (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-93). Readers first learn how to summarize a single paragraph; then when working with longer passages, they create a summary of the paragraph summaries.

Summarizing is difficult, but research suggests that teaching learners this strategy is worth the effort. Summarization training has been shown to be effective in improving learners' ability to compose summaries and also has important transfer effects. Studies on children indicate that learners have better recall of the summarized information and are more successful in answering questions about the text than those who were not taught to summarize (NICHD, 2000. p. 4-46). Summarization improves comprehension, perhaps, because readers who are asked to summarize spend more time reading and must pay close attention to the text (NICHD, p. 4-92).

Summarization is often applied to expository (nonfiction) texts. It is a valuable study skill because readers cannot remember everything they read, so they need to be sure they focus on the most important facts and ideas. Because most adult learners want to improve their reading for important reasons—often to pass the GED tests or to understand and use work-related materials—explaining this rationale may be a good way to introduce instruction in the summarization strategy.

Almost all of the summarization research reviewed by the National Reading Panel was done with children in grade five and above (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-92). Researchers may have focused on older children because summarization is a difficult skill in itself, and to teach it as a tool for improving reading skills assumes a significant level of existing reading and writing competence. In addition, readers must be able to distinguish important from less important ideas and make general statements that apply to a set of similar/related facts or examples. These are advanced thinking skills.

You may find some of the activities on the next few pages most appropriate for the better readers and critical thinkers in your class. Suggestions for first steps—introducing the underlying thinking skills to beginners—are also included.

Identifying main ideas. A key feature of the summarization process (and the first step in learning to summarize lengthy texts) is identifying main ideas in paragraphs. A main idea statement may be understood as a one-sentence summary of a paragraph (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997). To introduce the concept, begin by defining terms:

- The *topic* of a paragraph is its subject, "the general category or class of ideas . . . to which the ideas of a passage as a whole belong" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 258). It usually can be stated in a word or phrase: tornadoes, mammals, local preschools, a healthful diet, the Vietnam War, or job hunting.

6. SUMMARIZATION (CONTINUED)

- The *main idea* of a paragraph is a statement of what the paragraph is about—"the gist of a passage; central thought" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 148).

In other words, the main idea is what the writer has to say about the topic.

Example

The topic of the paragraph is local unemployment.
The main idea is that the local unemployment rate has recently increased.

Sometimes the main idea is directly stated in a topic sentence. Recognizing a topic sentence is simpler than inferring an unstated main idea, but learners still may need practice. You will need multiple examples of well written paragraphs that have topic sentences. A good source for these is a comprehension skills workbook. Show several examples of paragraphs with topic sentences at different locations in paragraphs. Explain that readers should not assume the first sentence is the topic sentence.

Of course, most of the time there is no topic sentence, and the reader must infer the main idea. Here are some ideas for teaching learners how to identify an implied (unstated) main idea.

- *Mapping:*

  Make a map of the paragraph, leaving the center bubble empty, and writing each idea or piece of information in a separate bubble. Compose a sentence that applies to all the bubble elements and "pulls them all together." Write the sentence in the middle bubble.

- *Questioning*

  Try this three-step procedure (Hancock, 1987):

  1. What is the topic of the paragraph?
  2. What is the author's purpose in writing about the subject?
     – To define, explain, or describe something?
     – To persuade the reader to agree with an opinion or to take some kind of action?
     – To criticize or defend a person or action?
  3. Given the purpose, what is the author trying to make the reader understand about the topic? (If the author is defining something, what is the definition? If the author is trying to persuade, what is the primary argument?)

In working with beginners, you may need to begin by teaching the underlying skills. Composing a main idea statement requires learners to generalize; they must discover what a series of facts or ideas have in common and then choose language that expresses this common theme. You might start with simple tasks, as in the next suggestion.

6. SUMMARIZATION (CONTINUED)

- *Generalizing: The underlying skill*

  Write a series of simple narrative paragraphs in which one person is described as doing several things. In each sentence the person is doing something else. The task for learners is to state the main idea. You give explicit directions: Name the person and tell the main thing the person did in all the sentences.

  "Tom cooked two eggs. He poured orange juice into a glass. He put cereal into a bowl. He poured milk into a bowl."

  Main idea: Tom made breakfast. (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997, p. 249)

  When learners are able to do this, make the task a bit more complex by creating sample paragraphs in which different persons do different things. The learners must then decide on a general term to describe the people as well as the actions (Carnine et.al.).

Other approaches to summarization. The summarization studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel used variations of so-called "rule-based procedures" (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-93; Duke & Pearson, 2002). The example below is a procedure for summarizing a paragraph (McNeil & Donant, as cited in Duke & Pearson).

- *A rule-based procedure*

  Rule 1: Delete unnecessary material.
  Rule 2: Delete redundant [repetitive] material.
  Rule 3: Compose a word to replace a list of items.
  Rule 4: Compose a word to replace individual parts of an action.
  Rule 5: Select a topic sentence.
  Rule 6: Invent a topic sentence if one is not available.

  Of course, to know what is unnecessary the reader must already have at least a sense of the main idea of the paragraph, so you might want to have learners create paragraph maps first and/or work with a partner to think through the decisions to delete material. See Appendix D for an example of this procedure.

- *The GIST procedure*

  GIST, which stands for Generating Interactions between Schemata and Texts, is another summarization strategy (Cunningham, as cited in Duke & Pearson, 2002 and in Allen, 2004). GIST calls for readers to begin by summarizing the first sentence of a paragraph using no more than 15 words. Then they read the next sentence and create a summary of the two sentences. Proceeding in this way with each sentence, they end up with a summary of the whole paragraph using no more than 15 words.

6. SUMMARIZATION (CONTINUED)

GIST may be adapted for longer selections and more advanced learners by working with paragraphs instead of sentences. They compose a one-sentence summary of the first paragraph, then do the same for the second paragraph, and then combine the two summaries into one sentence. Working one paragraph at a time in this way, they end up with a short summary of the entire selection.

- *Summaries of longer texts*

  More advanced learners may develop both reading and writing skills by composing summaries of a textbook chapter or other lengthy text. A rule-based approach for creating written summaries is suggested below (Sheinker & Sheinker, as cited in Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997, p. 327).

  1. Skim a passage.
  2. List key points.
  3. Combine related points into single statements.
  4. Cross out least important points.
  5. Reread list.
  6. Combine and cross out to condense points.
  7. Number remaining points in logical order.
  8. Write points into paragraph in numbered order.

7. MULTIPLE STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION

Many of the strategies above are best used within a multiple-strategies approach (NICHD, 2000, P. 4-44, 45, 46). In the studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel two or more strategies were taught in the context of an interaction between teacher and learners, usually in small groups (NICHD, p. 4-77).

Most of the research included in the Panel's review were studies of "reciprocal teaching" (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-79, 80). In reciprocal teaching, the teacher first models the comprehension process, showing how she/he interacts with text, using two or more of the following strategies in combination: question generation, summarization of main ideas, clarification of word meanings or confusing text, and prediction of what will come next in the text. The teacher explains how and when the strategy is used and provides guidance as the learners practice applying the strategies in working through a passage. Gradually, as they become more skilled in the use of the strategies, the teacher releases control of the process, and the readers use the strategies independently in their reading.

This not a formulaic approach; it reflects what good readers do while reading. Readers learn to use the strategies flexibly as needed, depending on the text. In pairs or small groups, learners may take turns in the teacher role, acting as the questioner, the clarifier, the summarizer, or the predictor (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003; Allen, 2004). Through interactions with the teacher, the text, and other learners, they acquire the habit of active reading, reasoning, and problem solving.

In other approaches reviewed by the National Reading Panel, more strategies were taught in combination, including comprehension monitoring, story structure, vocabulary instruction, and others. Cooperative learning (see below) is often used to provide practice of these strategies.

▶ **An idea from the research on children: To improve ABE learners' general reading comprehension achievement (those ABE learners reading above Grade Equivalent 3), teach them to use a repertoire of several strategies that they can use consciously and flexibly as needed while reading and that enable them to become actively engaged in understanding a text. Combinations of the following strategies are suggested by the research: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, story structure, question answering, question generation, and summarization.**

Issues in multiple-strategies instruction. Learners should have basic decoding skills to make use of the multiple-strategies approach. In fact, much of the research on reciprocal teaching that was reviewed by the National Reading Panel was done with students in fourth grade and above, and older students (seventh and eight graders) benefited most. We might conclude that these multiple-strategies approaches are likely to be most effective with mid- to high-level adult readers (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-79).

A further caution has to do with the realities of adult learners' attendance and "time on task." Because these are complicated, multi-faceted approaches, you will need to make time to introduce and model, and provide practice and feedback with several examples. As always, consider the needs and strengths of your group and the realities of your setting when choosing comprehension strategies to teach.

8. COOPERATIVE LEARNING

This approach may be useful in the classroom to build skill and confidence in using strategies that may transfer to independent reading. Adults also may discover from this experience that it's helpful (and OK!) to get another perspective or another person's thinking about a difficult reading task, and this is important learning, too.

A variety of cooperative learning approaches are possible. Adults may work in pairs or small groups.

If you have not used cooperative learning in your class before, you will need to introduce it carefully, stressing that adults can learn a lot from each other by practicing skills together and discussing them. You should also monitor group work to be sure everyone is participating and comfortable with this approach.

The National Reading Panel based its recommendations on research done with children in grades three through six, and this approach is probably most suitable for learners who have moved past the basic decoding stage and are comfortable reading or otherwise demonstrating their skills in front of others. If you are concerned about weaker readers feeling embarrassed, you might start by having them work in pairs, matching people with partners who have similar skills.

If you decide to give it a try, you could choose any of the research-based strategies, for instance, one of the comprehension monitoring strategies. Begin by introducing and modeling the strategy. Then if your class is new to cooperative learning or if you want to be sure everyone understands how to use the strategy before asking them to work together, you might provide *individual* practice with monitoring and feedback. When you think the learners can do it fairly confidently, decide how to pair or group them for cooperative learning. Choose reading materials that all group members can read, and keep in mind the importance of interest and background knowledge. Be sure to give explicit directions for the activity and post them in plain sight during the activity. Following is an example of how a strategy might be introduced to cooperative learning groups. This example is based on the self-questioning strategy for comprehension monitoring.

Sample directions

1. Read each section of the article silently. Look up when you are finished.

2. Take turns asking and answering who, what, when, where, and why questions about each section. When it's your turn, ask and then answer your own questions as best you can. If you want help, signal the group.

3. Discuss the section as a group for 3-5 minutes. Focus on answering the questions and any problems anyone has.

Small-group learning can be a powerful approach, especially in a mixed-level class. The research indicates that children of all abilities benefit from working and learning together (NICHD, 2000, p.4-71).

Of course, adult basic skills classes typically include a much wider range of abilities than is found in elementary school classes, so grouping decisions should be made carefully. Pair or group learners with similar abilities, to the extent that this is possible.

When adults get comfortable with this approach they may find it to be a good break from individual study and large-group activities. Some may find it easier to speak up in a small group. For learners who are working one-to-one with tutors, the experience of interacting with their peers may be both enlightening and reassuring.