

Interactive
comprehension
strategies for
students with
learning
difficulties

What inhibits comprehension for students with learning difficulties?

All or any of the following reasons:

A. Lack of fluency due to inadequate decoding skills and poor recognition of commonly used words

Dernarb hab a qretty dab dirtkbay, qoor dady. First he pot his finper stuch dekinb a doarb out in the dachyarb. After he pot his finper out, he fell in the qool and would kave browned if dip Uncle Dod kabn't brappeb him out.

B. Insufficient knowledge of the particular subject, concepts, vocabulary or literary style

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A + B

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Also:

C. Inadequate metacognitive strategies

D. Not interested enough or too disheartened to put in the effort required

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS

SCAFFOLDING: SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Recommended especially for texts higher than student's independent reading or vocabulary level

Important for all students in class

SCAFFOLDING METHOD

STEP 1. PRE-READING OVERVIEW ('ORIENTATION')

Some of the following basic strategies:

- Discuss relevant background information, eg. concepts, diagrams, pictures
- Relevant video / other visual for an extended or difficult text
- Vocabulary: students highlight difficult words to discuss/ list
- If set questions, read these before reading the whole text

For example

Key words: predicting the text

- Key words are given and students either:
 - Write their own definitions
 - Make up their own text from the given words
 - Compare with the text once read

i. Draw the experiment

(from limited information- individual or group)

Topic: *Expansion of air*

1. 'What do you already know about the topic?'

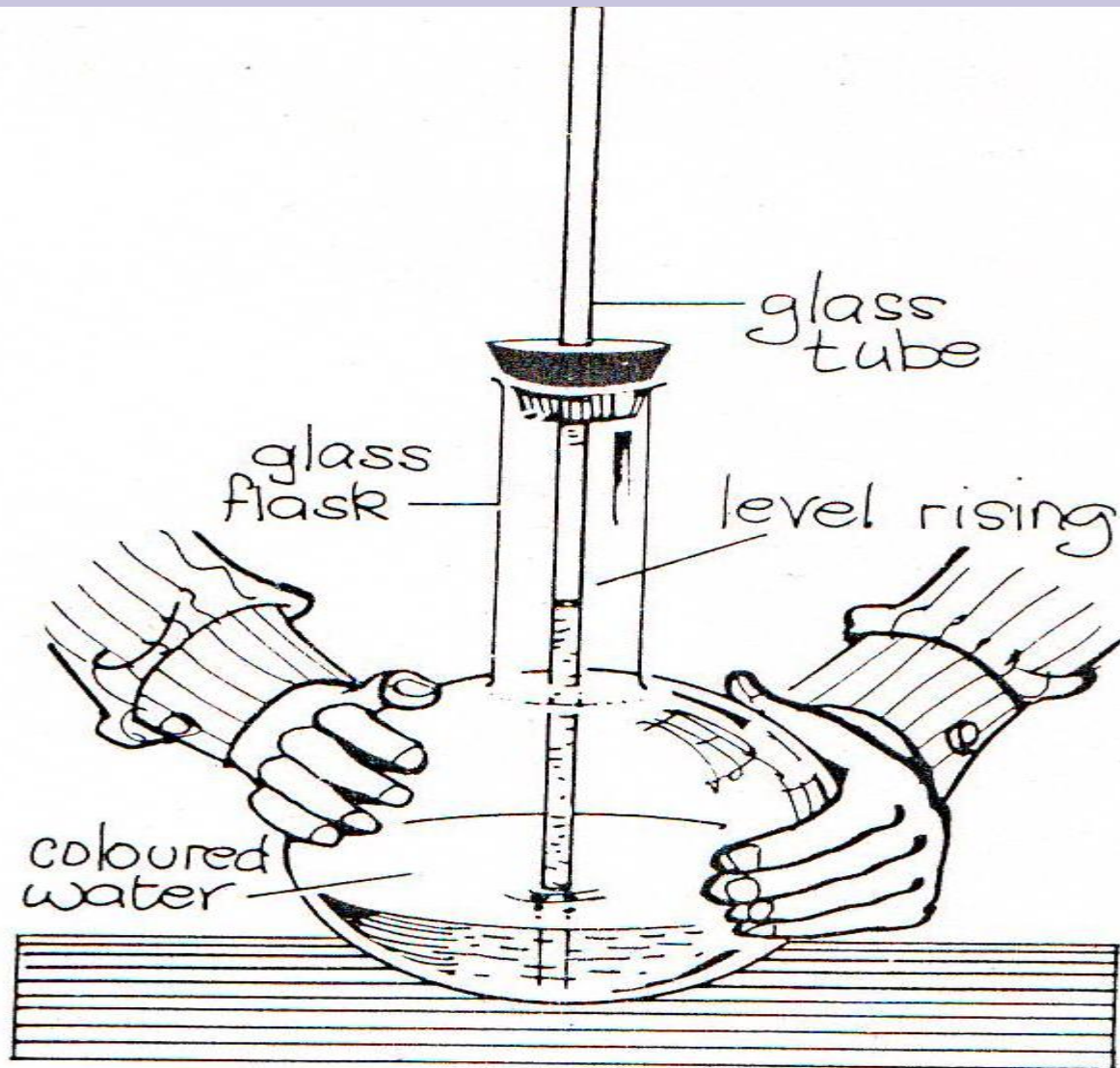
2. Read through the words

apply, heat, air, expands, demonstrated, hands, flask, partly filled, coloured water, airtight stopper, glass tube, heat, hands, through, glass, inside, flask, expands, expanding air, water, up, tube

Do any need explaining?

3. 'Draw what this is about' (one or more pictures) then compare with original

Expansion of air



ii. Guess the whole text- groups

Scaffold pre-reading

1. Look at the title: *The cats' meat man*. What might this be about?
2. Discuss concept: the days when traders went from door to door with their goods
3. Discuss this vocabulary: *threepence-halfpenny, barrow, whittling, impale, horse-flesh*
4. 'Write you own text for these words' (Words are in order)
5. Read through them with students:

rosy-cheeked, slice, horseflesh, board, barrow, basket, walk, whittling, skewers, impale, walk, door-knocker, trails of cats, every day, Sunday, knock, money, threepence-halfpenny, extra, two, I, rush, snatch, pull, Mum, don't, little beast, Oh dear, awful.

For '*The cats meat man*': Compare stories with original. Emphasise that differences are not wrong- just different. Could display if done on butcher's paper or compare with other groups. Discuss: difficulties and strategies of students who guessed a very similar text

THE CATS' MEAT MAN

Then there was the cats meat man. He was a rosy-cheeked fellow who would slice up the meat (horseflesh) on a board across his barrow and fill his large wicker basket up. He would then carry the basket on his arm and walk along the streets whittling pieces of wood into skewers; he would impale five slices onto each skewer, bang the door-knocker and leave the meat under the knocker. Trails of cats used to follow him sometimes.

He came every day of the week except Sunday when he would knock for his money, which was threepence-halfpenny and then give an extra two skewers of meat. I would rush to open the street door if I was about and I'd snatch hold of the meat and pull a slice off and eat it. Mum would say, "Don't let her get it, you know what she does, the little beast." Oh dear, I was awful. I couldn't do that now.

Dot Starn, p28 *The Green Storyhouse*, 1976

STEP 2. READING THE TEXT

- i. **Set questions.** Read through these first- for active involvement, students mark in margin of text, while reading, where answers could be found
- ii. **Visualising.** Remind students to visualise ('Make a movie in your mind') as text is read. Reading could be:
 - Individual (silent), if well-prepared
 - By teacher or volunteer reader/s
 - In small groups

Variation: Quick draw to aid visualisation

Students draw/sketch as the text is read to them, after any vocabulary explanations

Response may be:

- A single picture
- A series, in the style of a comic, or
- Graphic representation, eg. mind map (topic in centre, arms to details)

STEP 3. POST-READING TO AID COMPREHENSION

- i. **Graphic representation, eg. Venn diagram, table of characters, mind-map** (The characters in a play; images in a poem)

- ii. **Six thinking hats** Example: *The cats' meat man*
 - White: 3 facts : compare differences in life, then and now
 - Red: feelings of the girl at the time compared with later
 - Yellow: 3 positive things
 - Black: 3 negative things
 - Green: How else could the owners get cat food?
 - Blue: main idea

iii. Student generated exploration

- Collaborative: pairs or groups
- Each pair/group asks or writes questions for another pair/group
If written, swap and do; swap back and correct
- Questions could go in a lucky dip bag for class/
individual answering

Big W questions

i. Easy W starters

What? When? Where? Who? Why? Which? How?

Extended W additions + If? Could? Should? Might? Will?

Example: *Little Red Riding Hood*

Easy: *Where* was Red Riding Hood going? *Who* did she meet in the woods?

Extended: *What might* have happened if grandma hadn't let the wolf into her house? *Why* did the mother send RRH *if* she knew a wolf was around?

Example: *Macbeth*

Easy: (1. iii). *Where* were Macbeth and Banquo going?

Extended: *How could* Macbeth have been so taken in by what the witches said?

Focus on language

size, quantity	colour, shape	action	sound
emotions	conflict	whose perspective	
dialogue	movement	humour	imagery
Mood/atmosphere		Main idea/message	

Example: *The cats' meat man*

- **Size/quantity?** *Large wicker basket, trails of cats*
- **Colour?** *Rosy-cheeked man*
- **Action?** *Slice meat, whittle pieces of wood,.....*

STRATEGIES TO EXPLORE INFERENCE

Understanding how you know

i. **See, Hidden, Known, Heart** (adapted from Graham and Wong)

Answers to questions can be analysed as either:

- See it in the text
- Hidden in the text
- Known (I already knew that)
- In my heart
- Good follow-up from Big Ws

ii. **Evidence for your answer: visualise event while reading**

- Use with texts that contain ambiguities
- Give evidence for your opinion

Resource to practise visualisation and justifying with evidence:

Roberts, J. *Comprehension Plus & Advanced Comprehension Plus*, eg.

- ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE
- How many people are there?
- How old are they?
- Is a mobile phone making the noise?
- Who is going to buy a mobile phone?
- Why won't the friend say what it is?
- About how long is it between 'bips'?
- Think of some words to describe how Mark is feeling by the end of this conversation.
- Will they still be friends?
- What is making the 'bip' sound?

iii. Largely agree/ Largely disagree

- Useful for analysing novels and plays
- Big cards: 'Largely agree' and 'Largely disagree' at opposite ends of room. Statement, eg. *'Lady Macbeth is the cause of Macbeth's downfall'*.
- Students move to one or other (Good if private 'vote' first)
- Groups discuss and present their reasoning

Can be done as debate-

other students evaluate (Yellow, Black and Green Thinking Hats)

STRATEGIES TO ANALYSE PERSUASIVE TEXT

- Scaffold the initial reading of the texts
- Introduce terminology gradually, eg. *statistics, appeal to self-interest, persuasive techniques*
- Give students practice in recognising (and using in writing) only a few terminologies at a time
- Students can work in groups/ pairs
- Use supplied texts and students' own writing
- Whiteboard pens and Post-its used on enlarged texts under laminating plastic adds interest

Resource: Roberts, J. *Step by step text analysis*

SUMMARY

- Scaffold the task into 3 active steps:
 1. Pre-reading: prepare vocabulary and concepts
 2. During reading: visualising and thinking
 3. Post-reading: remembering and more thinking
- To increase interest (and learning) involve students in active things, often in groups
- Adapt activities for those students with learning difficulties who have other skills you can tap into, especially computer skills
- Screen reader, eg. 'Natural Reader', can help

Lack of fluency due to inadequate decoding skills

Problem recognisable by:

- Unable to work out unknown words, or
- The effort takes full concentration so cannot think about meaning too

Strategies

- In class help:
- Use all the other comprehension strategies (to be discussed)
- Individual help:
- For regularly spelled words, eg. *foundation*. Help the student to break up the word, eg. *found/a/tion*. You may have to prod (and tell): 'What does *ou* say?' What does *tion* say?'
- For a word longer than two syllables, the student covers up all but the first part and gradually reveals the word
- For irregular words, eg. *enough*: 'We can't really sound this word out. What would make sense here?'

DEALING WITH SPECIFIC READING PROBLEMS

Lack of fluency due to poor recognition of commonly used words

Problem recognisable by:

- Sounding out words you would expect them to recognise
- Usually goes hand-in-hand with poor decoding skills

Strategies

- In class help:
 - Use a variety of comprehension strategies
- Individual help:
 - Put words to learn on file cards. Go through a 5-10 at a time to practise. Use in quick games, eg, Noughts and crosses. Mark on back of card each time read quickly. After 5 'corrects', card goes in 'I know' bundle.

Insufficient knowledge of the particular subject, concepts, vocabulary or literary style

Problem recognised by:

- Don't/can't do what is required
- May be able to answer set questions but not have a clue when asked, 'What was that about?'
- Predictable limitations, eg. ESL, limited experience of a range of vocabulary

Strategies

- In class and individual help:
 - Previewing concepts before reading
 - Presenting vocabulary and hard-to-read words before reading
 - Discussion, especially with other students

Poor metacognitive strategies

Problem recognised by:

- When asked 'What did you picture in your mind?' (if subject familiar) student doesn't know (Didn't visualise)
- Can't identifying main idea
- Doesn't check when sense is lost: Reads on when it doesn't make sense (Poor decoding skills, urgency to get to the end)
- Forgets everything he read (Doesn't think to remember to remember; a poor working memory; all cognitive effort on decoding ; didn't visualise)

- **Strategies** Refer below plus
- Give practice by reading while students close eyes an 'imagine' or draw- strengthen visualising strategy
- Ask, 'What would you draw for this?'
- Hear student read aloud (privately) to assess; remind that if it doesn't make sense then we have missed or misread something
- Similar strategies as for 'Experience' (above) and teach cognitive strategies

Not interested enough or too disheartened to put in the effort required

Problem recognisable by:

- Avoidance strategies
- Antagonism

Strategies: Refer specific strategies, plus

- Vary tasks and ways of doing them
- Provide enough support for success

CONCLUSION

Share with a neighbour

1. Name something you have you gained from this session
2. What is one key point from this session?