**Improving Reading Comprehension**

# Most people know how to “read,” but not nearly as many can comprehend what they read. Reading comprehension is a skill. If you don’t use it regularly, it soon becomes harder. For example, if you don’t play volleyball for months, the first time you are back on the court you will be out of breath and can’t seem to get the ball across the net. If a skill like playing volleyball takes practice, why should reading be any different?

**Comprehend** **(understand)**, **don’t skim.**

* Simply scanning your eyes over the words does not count as comprehending. You need to be able to understand almost everything you are reading.
* If you don’t understand everything, try rereading the difficult sentence or paragraph.
* If you run across a word you don’t know, take time to look it up. Often knowing the exact definition of a word can change the whole meaning of the sentence or paragraph.
* Reading well the first time actually saves time and energy since you don’t have to reread entire sections of a work because you skimmed it the first time.
* When reading for comprehension, find a place to read where you can read without being distracted. Put your phone or computer in another room if they distract you.

**Retain what you read.**

* Take notes on what you are reading. Write down whatever seems to be the most important information.
* If your teacher allows it, highlight important information.
* After reading and taking notes on the assigned chapter or section of text, look back over it to refresh yourself on your notes and highlights. Take any additional notes or highlights you feel are necessary.
* If you read well the first time through, it will be much easier to retain what you read.

**Engage** **with the story.**

*This section applies to stories, both fiction and non-fiction.*

* **Ask questions**
  + **Why did the author put this in the story?** Good writers usually have a purpose for every word they put in their works. If something looks out of place, it is probably there for a reason.
  + **Why did this character react this way?** By asking yourself why they did what they did, you can learn what motivates them. Seeing how a character acts and reacts to situations can tell you a lot about them.
  + **What can I learn from the actions of the characters?** Often you can gather inspiration or warning from the good choices or mistakes of the characters in the story.
* **Find meaning**
  + **What is the theme of this work?** Discover the theme of the work and ask yourself what motivated the writer to write about this issue.
  + **What can I learn from this work?** Use the author’s insights into human nature to better understand the world around you and what can motivate people to act the way they do.