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How Position of Reading Questions Affects the Reading Comprehension of High and Low Ability Readers

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This study investigates the optimum placement of reading questions in textbooks. Is it better to have reading questions embedded in chapters or placed at the end of chapters? One independent variable is reading question placement (embedded vs. end). Another independent variable is reading comprehension ability (higher vs. lower). Participants read a chapter from a statistics book, listened to stories as a distractor task, and then answered three types of questions about the statistics chapter. The dependent variable is the percent correct for each question type. Target questions tested the same content as a previous reading question. Related questions tested similar content. Non-target questions tested unrelated content. We will analyze our data with three 2 x 2 factorial ANOVAs. We expect embedded questions will help lower-ability readers on target and related questions. Further, embedded questions will hurt the performance of higher-ability readers on non-target questions. Higher and lower comprehenders differ in their ability to suppress irrelevant information. Embedded questions facilitate suppression processes by highlighting specific content in the reading. However, for high comprehenders who already suppress irrelevant information effectively, embedded questions may lead to “over suppression,” causing non-target information to be processed less well.

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