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Reading Reminder: A New Tool for Scaffolding Strategic Readers

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The value of using reading strategies to help comprehend text has become widely accepted in the field of literacy (Flood & Lapp, 1990; Pressley, 2000). Clearly, effective readers tend to be strategic ones. They approach text in a systematic way, using a set of before, during, and after reading comprehension strategies to make sense of what they read. Reading strategies not only assist them in understanding the text but also in evaluating the material on several levels.

This article introduces a newly developed learning tool called the "Reading Reminder," which scaffolds intermediate-and middle-grade students in the use of research-based reading strategies. The Reading Reminder, presented in Figure 1, is a simple visual memory aid that can take the form of a bookmark, desk reference, wall chart, or bulletin board. It is designed to make the task of remembering a large number of available reading strategies easier. In effect, the Reading Reminder indicates which strategies are available, as well as when and how to use them.

The idea for such a memory aid is not completely original. For instance, Comprehension System 8 (Eddy & Gould, 1990) is another set of developmentally appropriate prompts for before-and during-reading strategies that are geared for children in the primary grades. The Reading Reminder builds upon this system and others by including considerably more during reading strategies (i.e., metacognitive strategies like paraphrasing, revising predictions, adjusting reading rate, and using context clues) as well as after-reading strategies such as summarizing and evaluating. The additional strategies make the Reading Reminder a more appropriate tool for older students.

Strategic Reading Instruction

Research suggests that the most effective readers can use before, during, and after reading comprehension strategies in a timely, purposeful, and flexible manner (Marinak, Moore, Henk, & Keepers, 1998; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Before reading, they surveyor preview the text to get a feel for its nature, topic, and format. Done properly, surveying allows readers to activate their prior knowledge, make predictions about the content, and set purposes for engaging with the text (Dole, Valencia, Greer, & Wardrop, 1991; Langer, 1984; Neuman, 1988).

During reading, effective readers know when and how to use mental imagery to form pictures in their minds, to make connections between and among related ideas, and to monitor their comprehension through self-questioning and paraphrasing (Borduin, Borduin, & Manley, 1994; Dreher & Gambrell, 1985; Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Griffey, Zigmond, & Leinhardt, 1988). If comprehension breaks down during reading, they also know how to use various fix-up strategies to reduce or eliminate their uncertainty (Baumann, Seifert-Kessell, & Jones, 1992; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Silven, 1992). Fix-up strategies include revising predictions during reading, slowing down to cope with the demands of the text, re-reading, using context to enhance understanding, and knowing when, how, and who to ask for help.

After reading, strategic readers may use summarizing or retelling as a way to bring closure to their basic understandings. Such strategies allow them to achieve a richer conceptual closure

(Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Brown & Day, 1983). In addition, these readers often make judgments about the value of the ideas presented in a text or about a text's literary quality. Acquiring these higher-level comprehension skills demonstrates important growth as a reader.

There is very little question that before-, during-, and after reading strategies ought to be taught to developing readers. The strategies have been applied successfully enough in classroom practice that they deserve to be promoted widely (Flood & Lapp, 1990). More specifically, we know that when these strategies are taught directly, students become better readers (McIntyre, 1996). We also know that comprehension strategies must be taught and practiced extensively in order for students to use them automatically during independent reading (Barr & Johnson, 1997).

One particular challenge for reading strategy instruction is the large number of strategies. For example, the Reading Reminder includes 10 major strategies and as many as 15 when all of the comprehension monitoring and fix-up strategies are considered. With this many strategies to manage, readers might easily forget which ones are available, when they should be used, and how they should be applied. The Reading Reminder is away to help students access the strategies, use them at the right time, and apply them more effectively.

Although the Reading Reminder's particular set of strategies might not be embraced by all reading professionals, it can be adapted as extensively as necessary by teachers to support the unique set of reading strategies that they believe will help their students most. In addition, the same basic strategies that comprise the tool tend to be useful across many types of texts and for many reading purposes (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Value of Reading Reminder

The Reading Reminder figures to be most useful for at-risk readers. In field testing, these students seemed to profit most from the use of the tool. Apparently, this concrete scaffold helps them to

apply the strategies more regularly and appropriately. Interestingly, though, the tool has also proven useful for average and above-average readers, because managing the large number of strategies is challenging for them as well. In effect, the scaffold should help nearly any reader who might benefit from a set of strategy prompts. In this sense, the Reading Reminder can assist readers in recalling the strategies and using them at the right time and in the right way.

Description of Reading Reminder

The Reading Reminder is a listing of before, during, and after reading comprehension strategies that includes an icon for each strategy and brief textual directions for its use. As Figure 1 shows, the tool includes four before-reading strategies, four major during-reading strategies (and seven supporting ones), and two after-reading strategies. These strategies were selected because the professional literature consistently characterizes them as being beneficial (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

The use of icons makes identifying and applying the strategies easier. Each graphic has been chosen to elicit recall of a strategy and to trigger the memory of how to use it. The accompanying text reminds students, through the highlighting of action verbs, what they are supposed to do when they use the strategy. Embedded within some of the strategy descriptions are analogies (e.g., to explorers, fortune-tellers, archers, racecar drivers, etc.) that teachers can use as additional memory aids if desired. The ultimate goal of the Reading Reminder is to help make strategy use so automatic and effective for students that the scaffold is no longer needed. Ideally, the icons, text, and analogies will lead to independent application of the strategies when the tool is used in conjunction with appropriate reading strategy instruction.

Before-Reading Reminders

What students do before reading can set the stage for increased text comprehension. The following pre-reading cues represent the strategies that should help students most to prepare for upcoming text engagements.

- *Survey.* The first icon, a pair of binoculars, signifies that students should survey or preview the text much like an explorer would inspect the unknown landscape that lies ahead. The binoculars remind students to LOOK at the title, visual features, headings, and any other clues to the nature of the text. Students benefit from getting an advance sense of the topic, the type of text, its organization and formatting, and any other special characteristics, just as the explorer would benefit by taking a panoramic look through the binoculars. In this sense, both explorers and readers fare better when they plot an informed course. Effective surveying of the text is especially important to prereading because it sets the stage for all of the other before-reading strategies.
- *Activate Prior Knowledge.* The light bulb icon alerts students to THINK about the ideas that they already have about the topic. By calling to mind what they already know, students activate schema that will help them to understand and interpret new ideas as they occur later in the text. Besides assisting with conceptual understandings, this brainstorming can also be applied to text structure. When surveying shows students that the material is in narrative form, they should think about their knowledge of story elements. Likewise, when they know the text is informational in nature, students benefit from thinking about their knowledge of expository text structures, because it shapes their expectations for the reading.
- *Make Predictions.* The crystal ball is meant to encourage students to PREDICT what will occur in a story or what information will be presented in an informational text. Just as a fortune teller would gaze into a crystal ball to see the future, students should use what they have learned from surveying the text and activating their topical prior knowledge to make educated guesses about the direction the text will take. Students need to know that not all texts are predictable and that, in general, their predictions will more than likely need to be revised once they begin reading the material.

- *Set Purposes.* The arrow and target symbolize how important it is for students to SET GOALS and purposes for what they are about to read. Like an archer, students will be more successful in their reading if they can take deliberate aim at certain kinds of outcomes. The analogy of archers adjusting their goals to targets of varying sizes and distances also can be used to remind students that their approach to reading should change in response to the nature of the text or context. Whether students read for gist or for specific information, to answer questions or to retell, or just for enjoyment, a different approach to the text, such as skimming for main themes or key words, reducing reading rate, or noting sequence, would be in order.

During-Reading Reminders

Perhaps the most difficult phase of reading for teachers to influence is the actual reading of the text. While reading silently, students are largely on their own to make sense of the text. Teachers must place their faith in think-aloud and imagery techniques (Irwin & Baker, 1989), guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and combination methods like Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar, 1984; Palinscar & Brown, 1985) to exert an impact on what students do when they process text. The reminders appearing below presuppose that students have received focused instruction on during-reading strategies.

- *Form Images.* The camera Icon suggests that students should try to PICTURE images in their minds as they read. A camera can capture a scene in great detail, and a reader attempts to reconstruct a scene based upon the descriptive language that a writer uses. The resulting imagery not only assists in initial comprehension, but can aid in the retention of the associated ideas, while also enhancing the appeal of the text. The analogy of a photographer and a writer both trying to depict the same image for a viewer or a reader, respectively, is one that students can understand. It is important for students to know, however, that not all texts lend themselves well to imagery.

- *Connect Ideas.* The interlocking links in a chain signal that readers need to LINK key ideas together. Related ideas need to be connected, compared, contrasted, and reshaped to fit with one another for comprehension to occur. These associations contribute to the emerging meaning of the text as it unfolds before the eyes and in the mind of the reader.
- *Monitor Comprehension.* The current scheme suggests two basic comprehension-monitoring strategies: self-questioning and paraphrasing. These metacognitive strategies are regarded as extremely important ones (Garner, 1992; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

The check mark prompts students to CHECK their comprehension through self-questioning or paraphrasing. Self-questioning is appropriately represented by a question mark that reminds students to QUESTION themselves as new information is presented. Students should be asking themselves questions like "Does this information make sense? Does it fit with what I already know? Does it fit with what the author has already told me?" As long as the students can answer yes to the questions, then they can be reasonably certain that comprehension is proceeding. A negative response to these questions, however, suggests that fix-up strategies are necessary.

The second comprehension monitoring strategy, paraphrasing, is denoted by the icon depicting a child reading. Paraphrasing works on the principle that the ability to RESTATE information in one's own words is a strong indication that it has been understood. Again, if students have difficulty restating the information garnered from the text, then they should consider using fix-up strategies.

- *Fix-Up Comprehension.* Fix-up strategies are signaled by the gearshift icon. The icon reminds students that when comprehension falters, they need to SHIFT GEARS in order to clear up any misunderstanding in much the same way that a racecar driver would need to downshift in rainy weather. Students can be told that they must alter their approach to the text when comprehension gets "slippery." Within the scheme, fix-up strategies break out into the following five types.

A light bulb and arrows indicate that readers sometimes need to **CHANGE THEIR THINKING**. This icon should cue students to revise or reject their current understandings when appropriate and to seek clarification through new ways of thinking about the concepts presented in the text.

A road sign signals that the reader should **SLOW DOWN** when comprehension is faltering. Students need to know that reducing their rate of reading, especially with difficult text, can often aid their understanding. Students should expect that informational text by its very nature will be more challenging, and that reading rate may need to be reduced because topics are less familiar and less predictable.

The book and arrow icon reminds students that it is sometimes useful or necessary to **RE-READ** to make sense of the text. Sometimes just putting the text into the form of oral language and listening to it makes the content easier to understand. Students need to know that when re-reading fails, they might benefit from shifting gears again and reading ahead.

A magnifying glass is used to encourage students to operate like detectives and **LOOK FOR CLUES** in the context. Students should be aware that context clues can help them, but not all of the time. All too often, the immediate context provides only limited assistance in making sense of the text. In these cases, a different fix-up strategy should be used.

The final fix-up icon is the **SOS** signal. It tells students that it is acceptable to **ASK FOR HELP** when none of the other fix-up strategies have solved the comprehension problem. Just as a sailor on a ship would send out a distress signal in an emergency, the reader can request assistance when navigating the text becomes too difficult. Students should feel comfortable consulting knowledgeable others or any other sources of information that will assist their comprehension.

After-Reading Reminders

Once reading has been completed, students can engage in at least two additional reading strategies that might enhance their comprehension and personal interpretation of the text as well as to help them critique it.

- *Summarize.* The plus sign denotes that readers should SUMMARIZE or retell the key ideas in a lucid, well structured, and concise way. Students need to be able to "add up" what they have learned and recount it in an appropriately complete, clear, and faithful fashion. Summarizing requires considerable practice. It is not a simple matter to determine what information or conclusions deserve to be included in a summary. It is also not easy for students to decide the best order for restating the information.
- *Evaluate.* The balance icon reminds readers to EVALUATE what they read for accuracy, completeness, objectivity, and overall quality, as well as to REFLECT on new information or values that have emerged from the reading. For persuasive text, students should be told to "weigh the evidence" just as a balance scale would allow (Henk, 1988). For literary works, students will need prior instruction in a wide range of devices (e.g., metaphor, tone, mood, etc.) that permit analysis of the artistic caliber of a work.

Customizing Reading Reminder

In no uncertain terms, teachers must first provide effective reading strategy instruction for the Reading Reminder to be of any real benefit. This tool will not teach students the fundamental nature of the comprehension strategies or how to use them properly. Rather, it will permit students to access the strategies more readily and to deploy them more systematically.

The Reading Reminders can be formatted in various ways. Many teachers have encouraged their students to use it primarily as a bookmark. Teachers simply make copies of the Reminder (or an

adapted version of it) and then laminate the copies. Other teachers choose to reduce it in size to make it more convenient to handle. In any case, the bookmark can be taken from class to class, into the home, and anywhere else the students' reading materials travel. The bookmark can also be used when students are reading text from a computer screen. A less versatile, but still valuable, formatting is to tape or otherwise attach the Reminder to students' desks, again with lamination being recommended. Of course, this stationary approach limits the use of the tool to materials read at the students' desks. A large version of the Reading Reminder can also be placed on a wall chart or bulletin board, or displayed elsewhere in the classroom where all of the students can see it. Teachers can use it in anyone of these forms or in any other format they can imagine that might be helpful to their students.

Besides the various forms it can take (i.e., bookmark, wall chart, etc.), the contents of the Reading Reminder itself also can be changed at the discretion of the teacher. Strategies can be added or deleted to match students' learning needs. Perhaps a smaller number of strategies can be represented at the outset, with new strategies added as they are introduced and reinforced. For instance, the teacher may decide to start with only during-reading strategies on the Reminder. Or, maybe the teacher will want to treat before- or after-reading strategies as an instructional set. It is envisioned that once all of the major reading strategies have been taught, the tool will reflect a set of strategies similar to the ones presented in Figure 1. There also is certainly value in eventually representing all of the strategies, including the seven that support comprehension monitoring and fix-up processes during reading. The point here is that teachers can exert as much control as necessary over the strategies they include on the Reading Reminder(s) they tailor for their students, often with just some simple cutting and pasting.

Not only can the strategies themselves be changed, but so can the icons, the highlighted action verbs, and the accompanying text support. Students or teachers might find alternative icons that represent even better recall cues, and these should, by all means, be used instead. Likewise, the language used for the key directives could be altered if superior verbs are identified. And, by the same token,

some students might need more, less, or different textual support depending on their level of strategy acquisition. For that matter, teachers might choose to withdraw the textual support and include only the icons and action verbs, or they might choose to include only one or the other. It is important to remember that students may often be the best judges of what strategies, graphics, directives, and textual support would help them the most, so they should certainly be consulted and allowed to have a voice in the matter.

A Final Word

The Reading Reminder is intended to ensure that students have a ready reference for recalling and using comprehension strategies that they have already acquired or are in the latter stages of acquiring. Of course, given the many challenges of reading strategy instruction and the individual nature of students' learning needs, the prerequisite instructional support will take several different forms (Braunger & Lewis, 1998). It will be up to individual teachers to determine the best ways to orchestrate reading strategy instruction with their own classes of students, and they can adapt the Reading Reminder accordingly. In any case, it is important for teachers to introduce reading strategies in a gradual manner, and to teach toward mastery. Care must be taken to encourage students to make thoughtful use of the Reminder. If students over-rely on the tool, their reading can become too interrupted, and comprehension might actually be thwarted instead of facilitated.

The hope in introducing the Reading Reminder is that teachers will be better able to assist their students in acquiring and mastering a personal set of before-, during-, and after-reading strategies. Although the Reading Reminder has not been researched formally, anecdotal evidence from classroom use suggests that most students appreciate the support it provides and benefit from it. Teachers report that having the tool handy for reference increases the chances that students will access and apply the strategies successfully in authentic reading situations. This outcome is not hard to imagine because the intuitive appeal of the Reading Reminder is noteworthy.

When students can apply their repertoire of reading strategies to understand and evaluate text, their literacy empowerment expands significantly. Clearly, reading strategy use becomes all the more important in light of the ever-increasing real world demand for effective independent reading in our society. So, by cultivating reading strategy use in students, educators provide them with a valuable set of learning tactics. Viewed in this way, the Reading Reminder represents a modest, but potentially valuable, step in realizing this fundamental literacy goal.

Biography

William A Henk is Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. He is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters and currently serves as a reviewer for several literacy publications. His recent research interests have centered on reader and writer self-perceptions as well as lesson observation frameworks for literacy supervisors and principals.

















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**Appendix
Figure 1**

The Reading Reminder	
Before	<p> Look at the title, pictures, headings and style. Try to identify the topic of the text, its type, and way it is organized.</p> <p> Think about what you already know about the topic.</p> <p> Predict what the text will tell you using what you know about the topic and what you saw in the text.</p> <p> Set goals based on the type of text and on what will be expected of you or on what you want to accomplish.</p>
During	<p> Picture ideas described in the text when possible.</p> <p> Link key ideas together.</p> <p> Check your understanding:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Question yourself  </p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Restate ideas in your own words.</p> <p> Shift gears:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Change your thinking </p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Slow down </p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Re-Read </p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Look for clues </p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ask for help <i>S.O.S.</i></p>
After	<p> Summarize or retell the key ideas in a clear, well organized, and brief way.</p> <p> Evaluate the accuracy, quality, and fairness of the way ideas are presented and reflect on your learning and new beliefs.</p>