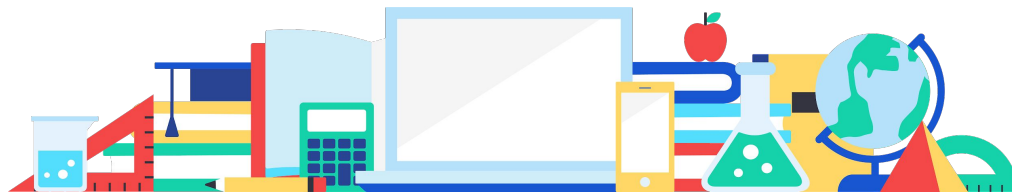




Reading Instructional Strategies

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What to expect in your reading sessions



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- **Topics**
 - Students come to UPchieve reading with reading comprehension assignments that cover a wide range of subjects, but you can expect to see mostly current events, U.S. History, literature, or short stories.
- **Assignments you could encounter in a reading session**
 - Reading with a set of questions
 - A text with a prompt for a short writing activity (up to a few paragraphs)
 - Reading to prepare for an essay. For these assignments, make sure you instruct the student to follow up in “Humanities Essays” after they’ve begun writing.
- **The support students need will usually fall in one of two levels**
 - *Students who can comprehend the text.* With these students, your job is to guide them through completing the assignment effectively and to push the quality of their responses to the next level.
 - *Students who struggle to comprehend the text and will need your support in doing so.* With these students, in addition to helping them complete the assignment, you will support them in developing an understanding of the text through a variety of strategies we cover in this training

Why students struggle with reading comprehension

Most challenges in reading comprehension are due to a lack of **background knowledge** or **vocabulary**.

All texts assume knowledge on the part of the reader and some students might not have the context or vocabulary to understand texts at their grade level just yet. Understanding the content of a passage is an important first step towards engaging students in the critical thinking process necessary to complete their assignments.

With some extra support from you, many students who struggle to understand a challenging text will be able to comprehend it and complete their assignments!

Setting your coaching expectations

We're sharing these strategies so our coaches learn research-based ways to help students improve as readers. You shouldn't expect to be able to use these strategies in every session or with every student.

We consider a session successful if you're able to:

- Provide a positive experience for the student so they're more likely to ask for help in the future (on UPchieve or elsewhere)
- Boost a student's confidence or growth mindset (belief that they are capable of improving)
- Believe in a student so they're more likely to believe in themselves

Begin the session

- Understand the assignment
- Ask the student what they need help with
- Read (or skim) the text
- Gauge your students' understanding of the text

Understand the assignment

Ask the student about the assignment.

You can ask questions like:

- Can you share the assignment?
- Did your teacher include any questions with the reading?
- Did your teacher share a rubric with you?

Note: If the assignment is both reading *and* writing an essay, set expectations up front that you can help the student begin, but they'll need to spend time independently writing the essay. For support with writing, they can request another session in “Humanities Essays” for either planning/outlining or revising/editing the essay.

Ask the student what they need help with

They may or may not be able to tell you. If they can't, take them through the steps as outlined below. If they can, skip to the part where they're looking for support.

Your support can include:

- Supporting student understanding of the question(s)
- Supporting student comprehension of the text
 - The student may or may not need help understanding the text itself. You can ask them: “Did you already read the text? How hard did you think it was?” to determine if you spend any time on this
- Helping students identify the important information in the text and push them to think critically to answer the question(s) or complete their writing assignment
- Improving the quality of their answers

Read (or skim) the text

Read the text (or watch/view the media) if it takes under 5 minutes. If it takes over 5 minutes, ask the student to identify a section or paragraph to focus on or skim the text if they don't know.

Make sure to communicate to your student that you're reading and it will take you a few minutes. You won't always have access to the text, but often if the student can't share it, you can still find it with a quick Google.

While you read the text, make sure the student is engaged in work as well. Depending on where they are, they can read (or reread the text), start answering the question or prompt, or continue on the assignment.

Texts students will be working on might include:

- A news article on the internet
- A short nonfiction text they can link to
- A chapter in a text book
- A short story
- A novel
- Other media - videos, audio, or visuals

Support student understanding of the question(s)

- Ensure students understand the question and key terms
- Break down the question(s)

Ensure students understand the question(s) and key terms

Check with the student for understanding of the questions or writing prompt. Ensure that the student understands the meaning of any relevant terms in the questions and the subtle differences between them. You should also check their understanding of the [text structure](#) if that's relevant to the questions. (You can always google a relevant term while you're helping or see the resources page at the end of the deck).

An example from a student:

- The assignment asks the student to: “Consider the following aspects in your response: form, style, structure, tone and other techniques used by the author.”
 - You can ask a student: “Can you share with me the definition for these 4 terms: form, style, structure, and tone?”
 - If the student is confused about the different terms, make sure that you share the correct definition (you can Google it) in simple language.

Break down the question(s)

It's important for a student to understand the questions or prompt when reading through a passage. This will help them focus on the relevant information. If a student is struggling with answering a question, you can break the question down into smaller parts to make it easier for the student to answer.

The first question you ask should have an answer that the student can find in the text. This helps them focus on the right information.

An example from a student:

- If the question asks “How were California’s geographic challenges overcome? Give two examples from the text.”
 - You can say something like. “Let’s start out by just identifying the geographic challenges in California. Can you highlight in the text where the author writes about the challenges?”

Support student comprehension of the text (if they need it)

- Ask a student what they already know!
- Ask questions about what the student does and doesn't understand
- Check for vocabulary
- Fill in knowledge gaps
- Ask the student to explain things in their own words
- Correcting misunderstandings

Ask a student what they already know!

Ask students what they already know! This will help you as the coach evaluate where gaps might be. It will also help the student retain the new information they're learning, help them make a connection to information they already know, and can even help them foster a personal connection to what they're learning. Essentially, it provides hooks for readers to hang their new knowledge on.

You can ask questions like:

- “This text is all about about the start of the Civil War. From what you know already, do you have any ideas about why the Civil War started?”
- “This story is set in the U.S. in the 1960s. Do you know anything about about this time period already?”
- “This news article is about teenagers and their relationship to technology. Before we dive into the text, can you share what comes to mind for you when you think about your relationship to technology?”

Fill in knowledge gaps

All texts assume some knowledge on the part of the reader. If there is critical information to the question or task that isn't in the text, make sure your student understands it by:

1. Asking if they know the important context—if they do, this is a great way to help them connect to knowledge they already have, which will help them learn and remember.
2. If not, share a brief and simple explanation that will help them get there. You can use what you already know or resources like Wikipedia to give good overviews of subject matter than can serve as an starting point for comprehension.

Example from a student:

- A student shares [this poem](#) and wants to include it in a paragraph about the effort to “Americanize” and “civilize” Native Americans
- The student shares that they don't understand it at all
- Start with a question: “Have you heard about European settlers collecting or studying bones before?”
- If they don't, you can share some brief context like “European settlers studied the bones of different races of people and displayed them in museums (this still happens today). These studies were used to “other” Native Americans and justify racist practices.”

Ask questions about what the student does and doesn't understand

Ask questions about what the student does and doesn't understand. Good readers are constantly evaluating whether or not they understand what they're reading while they're reading.

Questions to use to try this strategy:

- “Can you look back at the text and highlight the first part where you feel yourself getting confused?”
- “What do you think the author is trying to explain in the second paragraph?”
- “I think these lines are really important to answer your teacher's question: *‘Empires are far below thy aim/ And sceptres have no charms for thee;’* can you try to explain in your own words what these lines mean?”

Check for vocabulary

If there are difficult words that are critical to answering the question or understanding the text, make sure the student understands that vocabulary word and its usage. Feel free to share the definition of a vocabulary word and help the student identify which definition is being used in this context. Make sure you focus vocabulary on important words and not just rare or difficult words.

Here's an example:

- If a teacher asks “Explain how/where you see patriarchy in the text. You can explain how a character embodies patriarchy or how the plot demonstrates patriarchy?”
 - Since “patriarchy” is so critical to the question, first ask the student “can you share a definition of the word patriarchy?”
 - Test their understanding by asking a question like “Ok great definition. Can you now put it in your own words—how would you explain patriarchy to a 10 year old?”
 - If they continue to struggle, share a definition from the internet and a definition in your own words.

Ask the student to explain the text or concepts in their own words

Having to explain something in their own words has been proven to help a student comprehend a text or concept better. It will also give you the chance to identify any misunderstandings the student has and clear them up.

To make sure this isn't overwhelming, start with small, targeted asks. You can try this strategy at the sentence, paragraph or entire text level.

Additionally, the simple power of explaining a concept in **your** own words is one of the reasons that one-on-one tutoring is such an effective practice!

Correct misunderstandings

While you don't want to ever give the students the answer, you should always feel comfortable to correct a misunderstanding. Make your correction a bit easier to hear by using positively framed qualifiers

Here's are a few examples:

- “You're really close, and I think we just need to focus on...”
- “This really tricky! How I understand this section is... “

This goes as well with simplifying difficult sentences or concepts in the text. Tricky syntax, sentences, or vocabulary can be clarified by restating the idea or sentence.

Help students identify the important information in the text to answer the question(s), complete a short writing assignment, or develop their argument for an essay

- Encourage them to use evidence from the text
- Point them to the relevant section in the text
- Ask probing questions

Encourage your student to rely on evidence from the text

All the answers to a reading comprehension question (multiple choice, short answer, or a writing assignment) require evidence from the text. When in doubt, encourage students to go back to the text to find evidence for the answer.

You can say things like;

- “You’re on the right track! Let’s see if we can find some evidence to support what the author meant about it”
- “You’re onto a great idea and you did a great job identifying the tone the author uses. Can you find an example from the text that makes your point?”
- “This answer looks great - I love how you backup your conclusion with evidence. Is there anything else you noticed in the text that supports the argument? I think one more example would make it even stronger!”
- For a wrong answer “Hmmm, where do you see evidence in the text for that answer?”

Point the student to the relevant section of the text

Focus the student on the right section of the text. If a student is struggling with a question, first ask them to identify the paragraph where they think they can find the answer. If they can't identify the paragraph, feel free to point them to the paragraph with the answer.

An example from a student:

- If a student is reading [this poem](#) and the question asks “What are Washington’s attitudes towards political power?”
 - You can ask “Where do you see the author talk about Washington’s attitudes toward political power in the poem?”
 - If the student is still struggling you can say “Let’s take a look at the fourth stanza. Do you see any ideas in there that can help you answer this question?”

Ask probing questions

Ask probing questions to ensure that the student has thought critically, made connections, formulated an argument, and relied on evidence from the text.

For example:

- “Can you expand on your explanation of (fill in the blank)?”
- “Can you explain the connection between these two ideas?”
- “Why do you think this is the case?”
- “Why is this important?”
- “How does.... affect....”
- “What is the cause of...”
- “What is the effect of...”
- “Where did you see this information in the text?”

Improve the quality of student writing

- Support grammar and syntax development
- Support good word choice

Note: if the assignment is answering questions or a short writing assignment and you have time, you can support the student through the writing phase of their assignment. If it's an essay or you're short on time, you can always suggest the student spend time writing independently and return for help with their writing by requesting a "Humanities Essay" session.

If your student needs help on an essay

If the assignment the student has to complete is an essay, your role as their reading coach is to help them

1. develop their thesis statement
2. formulate the main points of their argument
3. identify evidence in the text to support their argument.

See our “Humanities Essay” review for tips on how to best support these steps.

Students may want you to help them complete an entire essay, instead, support them by letting them know that they’ll have to spend time independently writing their essay.

If they want further help planning/outlining their essay or revising/editing their essay, they can request a session in “Humanities Essays.”

Support grammar and syntax development

It's not your job to edit the grammar or syntax (sentence structure) of a student's work. This won't help your student learn or improve their writing. Instead, support them in fixing their own grammar by:

- Highlight areas that need improvement and tell them what needs to be fixed (for example: run on sentence, punctuation)
- Review the grammar rule they're struggling with—if you're struggling to remember the rule, you can always google it (see our Humanities Essays review to brush up on grammar)
- If they make the mistake multiple times, you can correct one of their mistakes as an example and let them practice on the others.
- If their writing has a lot of errors, only correct a few at a time starting with the most important. If they correct those and are up for improving their writing even more, you can keep going.

Support good word choice

Help your student with word choice by identifying areas that could use improvement. Start with words that are most important to the meaning of the sentence. Just like with grammar and syntax, highlight the word and be specific while pointing out the issue without giving the solution right away. Some common mistakes that you'll run into include:

- A misused word
- An awkward or unintended meaning
- Unclear pronoun reference (you can't tell what a pronoun is referring to)
- Misused transition word (like however, furthermore, particularly)
- Too much/ unnecessary repetition

When you identify these you can

- Clearly identify the meaning of any word they're using
- Ask if they can think of an alternative word
- Suggest a thesaurus sparingly, there may be appropriate times, but remember a student should have a firm grasp on the meanings of a word before using it in their writing
- If the student still can't identify a better word, share a suggested word with an explanation of why you chose it and the definition

Terms and definitions

A lot of literary terms, different types of questions, and text structures might come up during reading comprehension sessions. You can always feel free to google the definition of a term. Review these resources to get started:

- **Read these**
 - [Popular types of questions](#)
 - [Examples of text structures](#)
- **Use this for reference (not all words will be relevant)**
 - [Glossary of reading terms](#)