Comprehension Strategy Instruction for STAR/EBRI Volunteers

By Marn Frank, ATLAS Literacy & STAR Coordinator and Rob Podlasek, MLC Senior Training Manager

This handout describes what STAR/EBRI volunteers "need to know" about evidence-based and explicit comprehension instruction. It focuses on teaching **five** strategies: 1) asking and answering questions, 2) finding topics, 3) identifying main idea sentences, 4) identifying key details or important steps, and 5) writing summaries. All improve students' engagement and understanding of multiple-paragraph passages and articles; HOWEVER, it is best to teach just a few of them well.

What is reading comprehension? Reading comprehension involves a reader's ability to connect words, sentences, and ideas from a reading and understand the author's intended meaning. It is an active and challenging process requiring strong (or developing) alphabetics, fluency, and vocabulary skills. If any of these other skills are weak, the consequences are comprehension difficulties and reading frustration.

Who are your comprehension students? Your comprehension students are native or non-native English speakers who are ready to engage with longer readings of mostly non-fiction content. In some STAR/EBRI classes, the comprehension group is small and only includes students without alphabetics and/or fluency needs. In other STAR/EBRI classes, comprehension strategy instruction includes all students and requires lots of teacher and volunteer support!

What is your volunteer role for explanation? When you meet new comprehension students, briefly explain the value and process of instruction. Example: "Good readers use strategies as they read sentences and paragraphs. This 'strategy exercise' builds and strengthens our comprehension muscles so we can understand what the author meant to tell us -- even when the reading is unfamiliar or difficult. We will practice using ONE strategy at a time, starting with easier readings, and then -- when you are ready -- working with harder readings."

What is your volunteer role for modeling? Your modeling involves showing students how to use the new strategy and a graphic organizer or chart with <u>easier readings</u> -- all selected by the STAR/EBRI teacher. Using easier readings allows all of the students to learn and gain confidence with the comprehension strategy and chart -- rather than struggle with word reading or recognition.

1. Begin by reading aloud the title and entire passage or article. This gives students the "big picture."
2. Then go back and reread the first paragraph.
3. Model how to use <u>one</u> of these strategies and the chart for the first paragraph:
    a. ask and answer a key question beginning with Who, What, Where, When, Why, or hoW
    b. find the topic (a few words that tell who or what the paragraph is mostly about)
    c. identify a main idea sentence (the most important point the author makes about the topic), which may be stated in the paragraph or suggested by the words and sentences
    d. identify the key details or steps of a sequence (related to the topic and most important)
4. Reread the other paragraphs aloud and continue modeling how to use the strategy and chart.
5. After identifying main idea sentences or key steps, you might model the fifth strategy: how to write a summary by combining (and maybe revising) the sentences or steps from the chart.

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What is your volunteer role for guided practice? Your guiding involves supporting students' use of the same strategy and chart with <u>other easier readings</u> selected by the STAR/EBRI teacher. Again, begin by reading aloud the title and entire passage or article to give them the big picture. Then paragraph by paragraph, engage them in rereading, using the strategy, and completing the chart. Here are some prompts that gets students to read closely:

- Tell me a Who, What, Where, When, Why, or hoW question from paragraph 1 (2, 3, etc.). What is the answer based on the text or reading?
- Tell me WHO or WHAT paragraph 1 (2, 3, etc.) is mostly about. Are there any repeated words to help us?
- Tell me the most important point from paragraph 1 (2, 3, etc.). Are there any repeated words or phrases to help us?
- Tell me the first (second, third, fourth, etc.) key detail or step from this article. Why is it important?

What is your volunteer role for application? Your application involves supporting students' use of the same strategy and chart with <u>harder readings</u> selected by the STAR/EBRI teacher. They can work together as a small group, in pairs, or independently. Remind them to read the title and entire passage or article first, then go back and use the strategy and chart paragraph by paragraph. As needed, assist them with using the strategy, completing the chart, or writing a summary.

What is your volunteer role in monitoring? Once a week or every month, share students' graphic organizers or summaries with the STAR/EBRI teacher. Report any observations about their progress with each strategy or readiness for another. **NOTE:** Using comprehension strategies is typically hard work for STAR/EBRI students and it will take multiple opportunities with a variety of readings for them to become skilled and comfortable.

Need or want to learn more?
- ✓ If you have questions about comprehension instruction, the #1 person to ask is the STAR/EBRI teacher!
- ✓ You can also check out volunteer trainings and resources from the Minnesota Literacy Council at http://mnliteracy.org.
- ✓ If you want more information on comprehension instruction, check out ATLAS's website at http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-comprehension.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE TIME AND CONTRIBUTION!