

Learning through reading and writing across the high school curriculum

An online resource for high school teachers, students and parents

Information for teachers and schools

What's on the website?

This brochure tells you about a new resource produced by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW that demonstrates strategies that all high school teachers can use to support their students to:

- learn from reading across the high school curriculum
- write what they have learnt and write successfully for assessment.

The [resource](#)¹ includes a demonstration lesson where the teacher is using specifically designed strategies to help students to develop reading and writing skills while teaching the curriculum. The lesson is in Science but the same strategies can be used in any subject.

Supporting all high school students to read and write

Reading is the fundamental mode of learning in high school because the knowledge that students acquire in the high school curriculum is fundamentally written knowledge. Classroom learning activities in high school are intended to support students to learn from reading, and to assess what they have learnt in writing. Students are expected to read textbooks, novels, plays, poems, websites, worksheets, notes that teachers write on the board, and many other texts.



But as all teachers know, many students have difficulty acquiring the necessary reading, comprehension and writing skills to access curriculum content, as well as to successfully demonstrate what they have learnt. Issues for high school teachers include:

- how to teach at a level that will engage all students
- how to use texts that all students can read
- how to frame tasks so that all students are successful
- how to manage student behaviour when many cannot do the tasks independently or engage successfully in classroom learning.

The challenge for high school teachers is to provide students with the skills they need to learn the curriculum.

Using a process of modelling, guided practice and independent practice can help students to develop the reading and writing skills they need to access the curriculum.

¹ <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/7-10-literacy-numeracy>

The strategies

The strategies are presented in four stages:

1. Preparing for reading

The teacher prepares students to understand a text before reading it.

2. Detailed reading

The teacher guides students to read the text themselves, and to find key information.

3. Note-making

The students make notes from the information they have read.

4. Joint construction

The teacher guides the class to write a new text, using the notes they have made.

When using these strategies, it is important to select a text that students may not be able to read independently and with sufficient comprehension.

1. Preparing for reading

In this stage, students follow the text as it is read aloud. This includes two steps.

The first step is to give students the background knowledge they need to access the text.

Often this builds on knowledge that has been studied in preceding lessons. Before reading the text, the prior knowledge can be briefly reviewed by reminding students of, or by asking students to recall, key points. If it is a new topic, time will be needed to build up background knowledge before the reading starts.

In either case the teacher will have to read the text beforehand to find out what background knowledge students will need in order to understand it. Reading a text closely for this purpose reveals the depth and complexity of knowledge that students need to have, to understand the texts they are expected to read.



'The water cycle' image is reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press Australia from *Oxford Big Ideas Science 9 Australian Curriculum Student Book* by Cash et al, 2012.

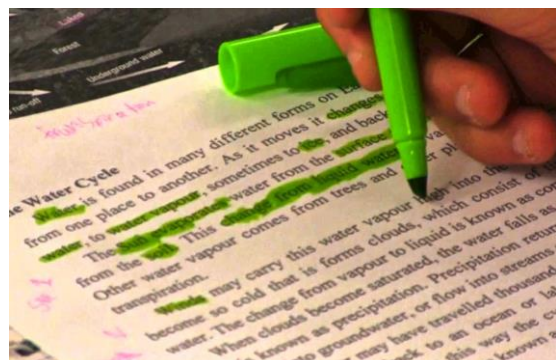
The second step in preparing for reading involves giving the class a brief verbal summary of each section of the text. This also requires teachers to look closely at the text beforehand to plan what they will tell the class about each section.

Using this strategy enables students to follow the text as it is read aloud, regardless of their independent reading levels.

2. Detailed reading

Once the text has been read aloud and discussed, the teacher can guide the class to identify information that will be used later for writing. Students can highlight or underline each key point. This can be done at two levels.

Long texts can be read paragraph by paragraph. As part of the discussion after reading each paragraph the teacher can direct students to mark two or three key points in the paragraph. These items can be used later for making notes and writing summaries. Paragraph-by-paragraph reading can happen very quickly. With practice, students soon learn how to identify key information themselves.



With short texts or selected passages in long texts, the teacher guides students to identify key information in each sentence. For example, the teacher briefly prepares each sentence by saying what it is about, then reads it aloud as the students follow (first stage: preparing for reading). The teacher then guides the class to identify the key information in the sentence, highlighting words and discussing their meaning in more depth. This may involve defining words, explaining concepts or asking students to interpret meanings (second stage: detailed reading).

The teacher asks individual students in turn, so that all students actively participate. In this way, students feel included and successful.

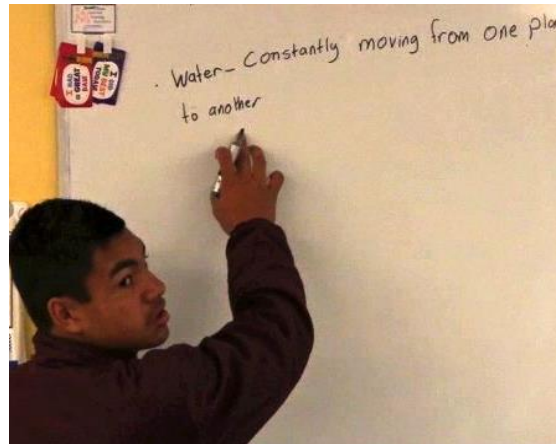
If the strategies in the detailed reading stage are used regularly, every week or two in a high school subject area, all students will rapidly learn to read difficult texts with understanding. As each sentence or paragraph is discussed in depth, the strategy benefits high-achieving students as well as struggling readers.

3. Note-making

In the note-making stage, the information that has been highlighted in the text is written on the board as notes. Students take turns to scribe notes on the board, while other students dictate.

This is a cooperative activity between students who now understand the information they are reading and writing. It provides opportunities for practising skills such as spelling, writing and pronouncing words, and for further discussion of word meanings.

Students take turns to write notes from each sentence or paragraph. The teacher guides students to say whole groups of highlighted words, so the meaning is clear. As the notes are written, the teacher reinforces and extends the meaning of each point, deepening the students' understanding.



Every student can participate in the activity, either by dictating or scribing. As the notes are written on the board, students write them in their books, so all students are actively participating.

When the notes have been completed, the teacher leads the class to identify how the information is organised. Each section of information is labelled on the board, and students label their own notes.

4. Joint construction

In the joint construction stage, the class jointly constructs a new text from the notes, guided by the teacher.

Using leading questions, the teacher guides students to consider the meaning of each piece of information in the notes and how it might be written using new wording. This might involve changing the order of elements within sentences as well as using different words with the same meanings.

Once the sentences have been decided on, they are scribed on the board either by the teacher or by students taking turns to write. Because the notes have been organised and labelled, it is easy for students to recognise structures such as paragraphing in the new text.



Once the sentences have been completed, the teacher asks the class to label each section again to provide a strong framework for students' independent writing.

Jointly constructing a text is not a simple process; the teacher should balance the amount of scaffolding provided to allow students to generate their own ideas about the text. It is a good idea to have a clear plan about where to take the text, before engaging students in the joint construction stage.

Programming

The strategies demonstrated enable the curriculum to be explicitly taught through reading and writing. They can be used as part of regular practice in any secondary classroom.

In general, 15–20 minutes should be spent in a lesson preparing for reading. After briefly revising the students' background knowledge, the teacher uses notes previously prepared to provide a verbal summary of the text, paragraph by paragraph or sentence by sentence. The text is then read aloud and discussed.

When the lesson is handed over to individual and group activities, all students will then be well prepared to work independently.

Individual and group activities may include continuing the reading, note-making and writing activities.

Every week or two a short text or key passage can be selected for detailed reading, in order to deepen students' understanding and control of the written language. Typically, 15–20 minutes is spent on detailed reading and then 15–20 minutes on reconstructing the text.

It is recommended that the class practise the joint construction strategy at least twice each term. This practice may involve notes that the class has made through reading in previous lessons. Short texts can be written together by the whole class. Longer texts can be started with the whole class and completed individually.

The final activity in this sequence is an independent writing task, in which students read, make notes and use the notes to write a text of their own.

The combination of regular preparing for reading, detailed reading, note-making and joint construction ensures that all students will be able to develop their reading and writing skills.

Sample lessons have been included in the online resource that demonstrate these strategies in action.