READING STRATEGIES AND TERMS

(Created by Jill M. Leone, Reading Specialist)
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MAIN IDEA:

This is the **key thought** or idea in a reading passage. It is what the author wants you to remember most. Where can you look for the main idea?



- 1. The **title** Check if the reading passage has a title for a shortened version of the main idea.
- 2. Reread the **first and last sentences.**The first sentence is often a summary sentence where the writer sums up the main idea.
- 3. Skim through the passage to see how many times a topic or issue is discussed in comparison with other topics. If one topic is mentioned only once or twice and another topic is mentioned four or five times (in different ways), it should be easy to tell the difference between the topic and a supporting detail.
- 4. Try to **sum up the story in one sentence.** Your answer should be close to the main idea.
- 5. Don't confuse a detail in the story with the main idea! Sometimes the main idea is stated directly, and sometimes it is not. When the main idea is not stated directly, **number 3** above can be very helpful.

THEME:

In addition to a main idea, many stories include a theme.

The theme is the **message that the author wants to deliver.** It's like a **lesson for life**, something you can learn from the story and apply to other life situations.

The author usually doesn't tell you the theme directly. You must figure it out for yourself by how the characters act and react.

DETAILS:

Details in a reading passage are any **specifics**, such as **names**, **dates**, **facts**, **directions**, **colors**, **and sizes**.

Details support the main idea and answer the following ten questions:

1. Who? 3. What? 5. Where? 7. Why? 9. How much?

2. Whose? 4. Which? 6. When? 8. How? 10. How many?

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When a statement of the main idea is not found in a passage, <u>put together the details in your head to figure out the main idea.</u>

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE:



Everything that is written has a purpose.

Books, stories, nonfiction articles, and other pieces of writing are written for different reasons.

The author's purpose (or intent) for most of what we read generally falls into one of the following categories:

1. To inform the reader -

Gives or presents information

Periodicals, human interest /news articles, and current events

Book or movie reviews

Announcements

Classroom lectures

Sports columns

Medical reports and research

Timetables and schedules



2. To narrate -

Tells a story or gives details or events in chronological order or the way they happened in time

Example: winter, spring, summer, fall

3. To explain or instruct -

Shows or gives a set of instructions, an idea, a step-by-step process, an event, or a relationship

Examples: recipes, directions, and/or instructions

4. To influence the reader -

Attempts to change the way the reader thinks or acts

To persuade/convince, discourage, encourage, push the reader into action, or warn the reader about something

Examples: newspaper editorials and opinion articles, letters to the editor, advertisements, advice columns

5. To show support -

For a person or idea

Examples: editorials and opinion articles, letters to the editor

6. To express feelings –

Like regret, sympathy, frustration, anger, annoyance, joy, or appreciation

Examples: editorials and opinion articles, letters to the editor **Not** current events or news articles

7. To compare or contrast –

Shows similarities and/or differences between two or more ideas, persons, places, objects, or events

Examples: essays, editorial and opinion articles, information articles

8. To share a personal experience -

Example: biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, essays (usually written in narrative text)

9. To request information or something -

Examples: business letters, classified ads, solicitations for financial contributions or donations



10. To entertain or amuse the reader -

Novels – essays – short stories – poems – newspaper or magazine columns

11. To educate the reader -

Textbooks – encyclopedias – literature – a series of books or articles - classroom lectures

12. To warn the reader –

Gives a warning about something that could be harmful or dangerous Editorials and opinion articles

Magazine articles – pamphlets – brochures

13. To shock the reader and/or get the reader's attention -

Supermarket tabloids, such as the *National Enquirer* or the *Weekly World News*

14. To sell a product to readers -

Advertisements - solicitations

***Students should understand that the writer may have **more than one purpose**, but generally there will be a **primary or main purpose**. This is the answer that should be selected on standardized tests where you are asked to *choose the best answer* for each question.

AUTHOR'S VIEWPOINT:



An author's viewpoint about a subject "**colors**" everything he or she writes. As readers, students can train themselves to be aware of how the author feels and some of the different ways the writer makes this viewpoint known.

Example:

Over the summer months, graffiti in this city increases by almost one hundred percent. Homeowners and other decent people are forced to reach into their pockets and spend their hard-earned dollars on chemicals to clean this disgusting mess off the block walls of their homes left by the *talented* artists who vandalize our neighborhoods as we sleep.

It should not be difficult for a careful reader to understand how this writer feels about the people who graffiti our homes and neighborhoods.

To figure out the author's viewpoint -



1. Look for positive or negative words.

- 2. When you have no word clues, **decide on your own overall impression.** Ask yourself if you feel shocked, or surprised, or impressed. Your own reaction may help you understand the author's viewpoint.
- 3. It may also help if you **know who the author is**. Humorous writers, for example, probably want to amuse and entertain you.

INTENDED AUDIENCE:

A selection may be written for children, adults, scientists, sports fans, teachers, children, high school students, etc. You can tell for whom it is written by the language used or by the way the topics are covered, or by what the audience is assumed to know. Example: Click the *Help* button in the lower right-hand corner of the software screen.

This is written for:

- a. computer programmers.
- b. young children.
- c. people who are learning computers.
- d. computer salespersons.



INFERENCES AND CONCLUSIONS:

To infer means to figure out something.

We infer or draw conclusions every day of our lives.

We base these conclusions on the information we have. For example, if we see a box with colorful paper and a pretty bow, we draw the conclusion that this must be a gift for someone. We cannot be sure we are correct. Maybe the box is a toy or a table decoration, but we draw the best conclusion we can based on what we already know:

Colorful paper is often used as gift-wrap.

Many people decorate gift boxes with ribbons or bows.

A conclusion is a decision you come to after studying the facts.

In reading passages, a conclusion is usually a decision about information **not stated directly** in the passage.

REMEMBER THESE 4 TIPS:

- 1. When you are asked to make an inference, you may have to make an intelligent guess. The correct answer is usually not in one specific place in the selection. (Expect to look in more than one place on the page to answer questions that ask you to draw conclusions.)
- Many times, you may need to draw on you own PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OR BACKGROUD KNOWLEDGE to decide which answer makes the most sense.
- 3. The key here is **READ AND THINK**, **READ AND THINK**. This is called *critical reading*.
- 4. Remember there are many messages under the surface of the page.
 Good readers learn to take meaning from the overall page by combining background knowledge with the words that are written on the page.

Here's a really helpful tip:

Make associations and put key phrases or ideas into your own words. For example, if you're reading about pollution, stop for a second and think about how many problems it can cause or how much worse it is now than when you were a child.

***Always try to connect what you are reading to what you already know.



Some **clue words** to help you draw conclusions are:

therefore in conclusion as a result of thus consequently in summary however

MAKING GENERALIZATIONS:

This is a rule or statement that **applies to many different situations** or events. To make a generalization, you take **information that you know** and **apply it to other circumstances or situations.**

Example: You read in a cookbook that you should not open the oven door during the first half hour that a cake is baking. You might then make the generalization that you should also leave the oven door closed when you are baking bread or muffins.

Some **clue words** you might see when a writer is making generalizations are:

in general some most few

usually tend to often



PREDICTING OUTCOMES:

We can often make reasonable predictions <u>based on what we know from the past.</u> Example: A TV show that's usually on at 8.00 pm on Thursday nights will probably be shown at this same time next week. Even though we cannot be sure of the future, we can make a **smart guess** based on what we already know.

Questions covering this skill might ask one of the following:

What is most likely to happen to...?

What probably happened?

What is the most likely result?

What is the least likely outcome?

***Check whether the story shows a particular pattern of events and use this information to help you figure out what is most likely to happen next.

TIME/ORDER/SEQUENCE:

This is the order in which things are done or happen in time.

When you're following directions or performing a task, you're doing a number of steps in a certain order/sequence.

In a reading selection, the writer may tell a complicated story.

The reader must understand which events come **first** and which events come **next** or **last.**

You should also be aware that writers sometimes describe events out of order:

Example: Pass up your homework *after* you sit down.

Train yourself to analyze sequences of events by paying careful attention to words, especially clue words.

Some of the most common **clue words** for time and sequence are:

first before prior to next begin subsequent

meanwhile last while during then lastly as soon as now soon shortly at last after

finally afterward later when

at the same time

MAKING COMPARISONS:



This shows how ideas, things, people, or events are the same or alike.

It is also used to show how things are different.

Example: We can understand how to drive a car with stick shift much better if we think about how this is *similar* to driving a car with automatic transmission and also how it is *different* from driving an automatic.

Some useful clue words to help students make comparisons are:

both too in a similar manner same also similarly like similar or another

as well as likewise for example

DIFFERENCE OR CONTRAST:

When making comparisons in a reading passage, it is also helpful to know how ideas, things, people, or events are different.

Clue words to help you understand differences or contrasts are:

but***unlikeon the contrarydiffer fromwhileyethoweveron the other hand

more/less opposite in contrast to although

better more **-er words***

*Examples of <u>-er</u> words: bigger, smaller, greater, easier, harder, faster, slower, etc.

***Understand how important a little word like <u>but</u> can be and train yourself to read very carefully after the word <u>but</u>, because everything that follows will be the opposite or totally different from what you read before the <u>but</u>.

The most misread words in the English language are <u>not</u> the big words. Most of us read carefully when we come to those words, but we tend to miss some of the little words like <u>but</u>, <u>not</u>, and <u>except</u>, either because we're in a hurry or we just take the little words for granted.

The result is the same = lack of comprehension.

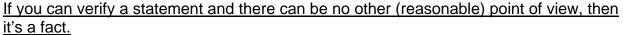
FACT AND OPINION:

FACT: A fact is a statement that **can be checked.**

Facts can be **proven objectively**. That means anyone who checks will find out the same thing.

You can prove whether or not a statement is a fact by:

- 1). Looking it up in a book
- 2). Checking records or statistics
- 3). Asking eye witnesses
- 4). Weighing or measuring



Most of the time, reading passages that contain **statistics or numbers are factual** because they can always be checked.

OPINION: An opinion expresses feeling and depends on someone's judgment or values.

An opinion is a statement which someone believes to be true, a point of view.

Opinions tell how the writer thinks or feels about something.

However, the major difference between a fact and an opinion is that an opinion cannot be verified or proven.

You can train yourself to tell the difference by asking two simple questions:

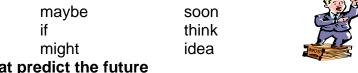
- 1). Can I check it out or prove it? (Now?)
- 2). Can there be any other point of view?

If you can answer yes to the first question and no to the second, then it's a fact.

Some of the most common clue words for opinions are:

should	believe	too
probably	maybe	soon
perhaps	if	think
feel	might	idea





As a reader, you should also look for **judgmental or value words.** These are words that depend on someone's judgment and cannot be proven objectively, like when you look up something in a book:

great	pretty
simple	easy
worst	difficult
ugly	wonderful
	worst

^{***}Note: There's a difference between predicting the future and referring to something that 's already scheduled and/or planned.

Example: Your high school graduation ceremony will be held in June.

This statement is a fact. It 's not predicting the future: it's describing the future as it's already been planned. It can be verified right now because events such as this are scheduled far in advance.



CAUSE AND EFFECT:

When something happens, we often try to understand <u>why</u>. We try to figure out the cause of a situation or event (or the <u>reason</u> for it).

The cause answers the question why?

It is the <u>first thing</u> that happens and it makes the second thing (the effect) happen.

The part of the sentence <u>after the word "because"</u> is the cause.

Other key words used to show the cause are:

Since the student forgot her homework, ...

As a result of her fantastic report card, ...

The main reason is not enough money.

An important factor was his participation in class.

The chief cause was too many absences.

The best explanation is too little interest.

Due to his constant tardies...

TIP: When you are answering a **why** question, always put the word **because** in front of the answer choices and then read them that way to help you figure out the correct answer.

Effect = the result

- The effect answers the question "What happened?"
- The effect is the <u>second thing that happens</u> (as a result of the cause, which happened first).

Key words to look for to figure out the cause are *therefore* and *consequently*. Sometimes no key words are used. The cause and effect relationship is then suggested or implied by the writer. When this happens, the you need to add up the details and decide.



WHAT HAPPENED = THE EFFECT

CONTEXT CLUES:

The way a word is used in a sentence or paragraph is called its **context**. The context of a passage is what gives it meaning.

Writers are often thoughtful of their readers.

When they use difficult words, they often provide clues to figure out the word's meaning. **These are called context clues.**

To figure out what a word means, read the following:

- The sentence that the word is in
- The sentence right before
- The sentence right after



This skill is practiced **without** the use of a **dictionary** for two reasons:

- ✓ Most of the reading that we do in our lives after high school or college will be done without the use of a dictionary.
- ✓ If we keep stopping to look up word after word, it takes our attention away from understanding. It 's almost like holding an empty paper towel roll up to our eyes and using it to read one word at a time. Less comprehension!

LITERARY AWARENESS

PLOT:

The plot is the sequence of events or **what happens** in a story or reading passage. Many plots contain a **central problem** – something that goes wrong. Often the characters in a story (or poem) have a goal to achieve or a problem to solve. **The struggle to achieve this goal or solve the problem is the conflict.** Types of conflict:

- 1. Conflict with self
- 2. Conflict with another character (or society)
- 3. Conflict with an outside force (nature or the supernatural)

By the end of a story, the character facing the conflict succeeds or fails.

The way a problem is fixed or solved is the resolution.

To identify the conflict, see if you can find the event(s) that caused this problem. Also, pay attention to how a story ends. Many stories end by resolving their conflicts.

SETTING:

Where and when a story takes place is called its setting.

Sometimes the author tells you where a story takes place and sometimes the reader must figure it out for himself from the details provided.

Setting is important in a story because it influences the way the characters act, think, dress, speak, and live.

Example: A story set on a beautiful, sunny California beach would naturally be different from one set far out in a stormy sea, miles and miles from the safety of the shore.

MOOD:

This is the **feeling, or atmosphere, that the writer creates for the reader.**The author can use the setting to create a mood, which is happy, sad, exciting, or boring.

As you read a story, pay attention to how the setting affects the mood of the story, or how it affects the people in a story.

Example: A dark and stormy night might create a miserable mood, but a bright, sunny, Saturday morning in the spring might create a joyful mood.

TONE:





Example: A story about two teenagers locking their keys inside a car might create a stressful or frightening mood. However, the tone could reflect the writer's amusement at the characters' predicament.

CHARACTERS:

These are the **people, animals, or natural forces represented as persons in a story.** Authors describe them carefully. You learn how they look, what kind of people they are, how they act in different situations, and how they change during the course of a story. In order to understand a story, you must understand the people in it.

People give a story its meaning.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER:

A writer may describe a character in a **positive or negative** way. If the writer emphasizes negative or bad things about a character, we know that the author dislikes the character. We know this even if the author says the character is very smart, or good looking, or has other positive features.

If the writer's overall description is negative, we know the author's feeling are negative.

Example:

As always, the school librarian was staying late helping students find information for their research papers. As they were shutting down the computers, a frantic knocking sounded at the door. It was a student who had left her research notes on one of the shelves. Mrs. Miller told the student not to worry; they wouldn't leave until the student's hard work was found.

The author's attitude toward the school librarian is:

a. negative b. neutral c. positive d. unknown

CLIMAX OR TURNING POINT:

(Part of the plot)

This is the **moment where interest and intensity is highest** and the outcome of the story becomes clear to the reader.

While **not** likely to be in the very beginning or the very end of the story, it 's <u>often near</u> the end.)

IRONY:

This is a contrast between what the reader expects and what actually happens. Example: In trying to avoid a classmate who usually eats lunch in the school cafeteria. you go to Burger King for lunch. Who do you think is sitting at BK when you walk through the door?



A fable is a short, simple story that **teaches a moral lesson**. The reader learns something about life that he may not have known before.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

Figurative language is not a special language. It's a special way that a writer uses words to create a picture in the mind of the reader. The way the writer is using these words is different from the definitions you might find if you looked each word up separately in a dictionary.

Figurative language often involves a comparison between two or more things that are basically unlike and is used to make the writing more interesting.

Metaphors and similes are examples of figurative language.

Metaphor (comparison) – Life is a road.

Simile (comparison that uses like or as) - Life is like a road

Additional example: The student was as quiet as a mouse.

Now, the reader has a mental picture of what the student is like.

This is also known as **metaphorical language**.

ANALOGY:

This is also a comparison of two things, stressing their similarities.

Example: Morning is to night as beginning is to end.

EXAGGERATION (OR HYPERBOLE):

Sometimes figurative language is used to **make something seem bigger** than it really is in order to make a point and help the reader understand.

Examples: "That teacher is as old as the hills."

"Haven't I told you that a million times?"







This is when the writer makes persons, places, or objects represent something other than what they really are. (Example: A rose is often used as a symbol for beauty or love.)

FLASHBACK:

This is when the writer suddenly stops the story to tell you about **something that** happened earlier.

This helps you <u>understand why the characters act and feel the way they do</u>. Flashbacks are often presented **as a character's memories or recollections.**

FORESHADOWING:

This is the author's **use of hints** to prepare the reader for **something that will happen later in the story.**

Writers use this strategy **to build suspense** and make you want to keep reading. This also makes events in a story more believable.

IMAGERY:

This is the use of words and phrases that create **pictures in the reader's mind.** Images can **appeal to your sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.** Some images appeal to more than one sense at the same time.

Example of imagery from a song entitled *The End of Innocence* by Don Henley:

"Remember when the days were long and rolled beneath a **deep blue sky**? Didn't have a care in the world with Mommy and Daddy standing by... I know a place where we can go that's **still untouched by men**. We'll sit and watch the **clouds roll by** and the **tall grass wave in the wind...**"

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER:

This is the **logical order or sequence of events in time** (from past to present or beginning to end). Example: winter, spring, summer, fall Reverse chronological order is just the opposite of this: five, four, three, two, one



EXTENDED DEFINITION:

The writer <u>gives the meaning of a word and several examples</u> to create a clearer understanding in the mind of the reader.

Example: A *bore* is a person who is not fun or interesting. A *bore* tells you the same things over and over. A *bore* can really put you to sleep. The saddest thing about a *bore* is that he usually has no idea that he's boring or that nobody cares. A *bore* is like the rabbit in the Energizer battery commercial that keeps running and running and running.

The Difference between Reading Fiction and Nonfiction

(Developed by Jill M. Leone, Reading Specialist)

<u>Fiction</u> is anything that is invented or imagined by a writer. Although it may be based on real events or experiences, its characters and settings are invented. Even if a story is set in an actual place and involves characters and details you recognize, you can usually understand that the story itself is **fiction**, **or not real**.



EXAMPLES OF FICTION WRITING:

- ✓ Short stories
- ✓ Novels



HOW TO READ FICTION:

- Usually, you read fiction for pleasure.
- Fiction (or literature) is read more quickly than nonfiction.
- You often form mental images or pictures in your head and use your imagination a lot to picture the way characters look, where they live, and what they do.
- Details are not as important as "the big picture."
- It's usually easy to remember what you have read.
- Many events are told in chronological order, which also helps you understand and remember.

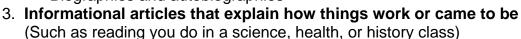


The opposite of fiction is nonfiction.

Nonfiction tells about <u>real</u> people, places, events, thoughts, and times.

EXAMPLES OF NONFICTION WRITING:

- 1. Writing that reports and explains an actual event
 - ✓ Newspaper and magazine articles
 - ✓ Historical accounts
 - ✓ Biographies and autobiographies
- 2. Writing that expresses personal feelings and writers' opinions
 - ✓ Letters
 - ✓ Editorials and letters to the editor.
 - ✓ Diaries and journals
 - ✓ Biographies and autobiographies







Different forms of nonfiction require you to use different reading strategies.

It is very important for you, as a reader, to <u>figure out what type of reading material</u> you have in front of you so you know which strategies to use.

Nonfiction (maybe more than any other reading) requires you to read critically and apply your background knowledge.

Tips for Reading Nonfiction:

- ✓ Always try to figure out the <u>writer's purpose and intended audience</u>. Writers change their strategies depending on their audience and their purpose. When we understand *why* and *for whom* something was written, we understand it better.
- ✓ <u>Look at content and organization</u>. Try to figure out **how ideas are organized**, which ideas are facts, and which are opinions.
- ✓ Before you read nonfiction, think about what you already know about the topic.
- ✓ Nonfiction is usually read more slowly and carefully.
- ✓ Nonfiction is mostly <u>read for a particular purpose</u>.

 For example, you read the newspaper to find out what's going on in the world, look for a job, or check out a movie review. You might go to the library to look up information about a topic online or in the encyclopedia.
- ✓ Nonfiction is <u>about facts</u>.
- ✓ <u>Details are important</u>. Sometimes it's difficult, but you should always look at more than "the big picture."
- ✓ Questions about nonfiction usually have one best answer.
- ✓ It's often difficult to create mental images when reading nonfiction.
- ✓ Also, nonfiction is <u>difficult to remember</u>. That's why it helps to always read the questions first.



- ✓ The main idea is often but not always in the first sentence of the paragraph.
- ✓ <u>Usually but not always the last sentence in the paragraph sums up the main idea</u>.
- Many times there are <u>diagrams</u>, <u>charts</u>, <u>tables</u>, <u>graphs</u>, <u>or other illustrations</u>
 <u>to help you</u> <u>understand what you are reading</u>.
 Pay attention to them and read them carefully.
- ✓ Nonfiction writing often <u>uses titles and subtitles</u>, which can help you figure out the main idea.
- ✓ <u>Headings, subheadings, bold print, italicized words, underlined words</u> are often part of nonfiction. There is a good reason why the writer uses these styles. They can also help you understand better.