

# Four Moves of a Strategic Reader

Display during reading lessons. Model one move at a time with a real text before asking learners to try it in pairs.

## Predict

Before reading, look at the title, headings and pictures. Say what you think the text will tell you, and what makes you think so.

**In class:** I think this text will explain how rivers flood, because the title mentions rising water.

## Clarify

When a word or sentence stops making sense, slow down. Re-read it, read on for clues, or break the word into parts.

**In class:** Erosion is new to me. The sentence says the bank wears away, so erosion must mean wearing away.

## Question

Ask a question a teacher might ask about this paragraph. Start with who, what, where, when, why or how.

**In class:** Why does the river move faster on the outside of the bend?

## Summarise

Say the most important idea in one or two of your own sentences. Leave out the small details.

**In class:** This section explains the three main causes of flooding.

# Build a Sentence, Colour by Colour

The Colourful Semantics colour code. Start with WHO and WHAT DOING, then grow the sentence one colour at a time: The girl / is reading / a book / in the library.

**WHO**

## Who?

The person or thing the sentence is about. Point to the orange card and ask: who is doing something?

**Example:** The girl... / Our teacher... / The hungry fox...

**DOING**

## What doing?

The action word. Ask: what is the who doing? Act the verb out if learners are stuck.

**Example:** ...is reading / ...whispered / ...is hunting

**WHAT**

## What?

The thing the action happens to. Ask: what is being read, eaten, built or found?

**Example:** ...a book / ...a secret / ...a rabbit

**WHERE**

## Where?

The place it happens. Ask: where is it happening? Add this colour once the first three are secure.

**Example:** ...in the library / ...behind the shed / ...across the frozen field

# Reading Prompt Cards

Learners keep one card on the desk during independent reading and use the prompt when they hit trouble.

## Stuck on a word?

Break it into parts. Read the sentence before and after. Try a word that would make sense in the gap.

**Say:** "What would make sense here?"

## Lost the thread?

Stop. Go back to the last sentence that made sense and re-read from there, more slowly.

**Say:** "Where did it stop making sense?"

## Finished a section?

Cover the text. Say the main idea in your own words, in one sentence.

**Say:** "What was that mostly about?"

## Before you turn the page

Guess what comes next and why. Check your guess as you read on.

**Say:** "What do I expect to happen next?"

# Vocabulary Teaching That Sticks

Built from the review evidence: words are learned through active processing and repeated meaningful encounters, not by copying definitions.

## Choosing words

- Pick five or fewer high-value words per text: useful across subjects, not just rare.
- Check the word genuinely matters for understanding this text.
- Plan a learner-friendly explanation in everyday language, not a dictionary definition.

## First teaching

- Say the word, show it written, and give your friendly explanation with an example from life.
- Ask every learner to do something with the word straight away: choose, sort, act, or answer.
- Contrast it with what it is not: a drizzle is not a downpour.

## Making it stick

- Return to the word across the week in different texts and subjects.
- Ask learners to notice and monitor: stop me when a word does not make sense.
- Display taught words and tick each time the class meets one again.

# Literacy Strategies: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the research behind this toolkit says, including where the evidence is still developing.

## ● Teach the four reader moves explicitly

Predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising, modelled aloud and practised in small groups, improved comprehension in classroom trials and a 28-study systematic review.

## ● Vocabulary needs active processing

Teaching word meanings helps learners understand texts containing those words. Copying definitions does little; choosing, sorting and using words does more.

## ● Be honest about transfer

Direct word teaching reliably helps with taught words, but evidence that it lifts general comprehension is limited. Pair word teaching with wide reading.

## ● Colourful Semantics: promising, still growing

School-based studies report better sentence structure and longer utterances. Standardised measures show mixed results, so track your own learners' writing closely.

### Evidence base

Spörer, N., Brunstein, J.C. and Kieschke, U. (2009). Improving students' reading comprehension skills: Effects of strategy instruction and reciprocal teaching. *Learning and Instruction*.

Mafarja, N. et al. (2023). Using of reciprocal teaching to enhance academic achievement: A systematic literature review. *Heliyon*.

Wright, T.S. and Cervetti, G.N. (2017). A systematic review of the research on vocabulary instruction that impacts text comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*.

Atwell, K. (2024). Using colourful semantic approaches as a group intervention within primary schools to improve language development. *Educational Psychology in Scotland*.

Bryan, A. (1997). Colourful Semantics: Thematic role therapy. In *Language Disorders in Children and Adults*.