Preparing for reading factual text

Reading to learn strategies for factual texts support students to practice four skills that are essential for learning in school, to:

- Read academic texts with understanding
- Identify key information in a text
- Take that information out using notes
- Use this information to write their own texts

Along the way students also develop skills in interpreting and critiquing both the content of text and how they are constructed. Techniques for reading and writing factual texts can be used at any level from primary to university study, in any curriculum area.

Preparing before reading

Preparing before reading enables all students to understand the text in general terms, by:

- Providing background knowledge they need to understand the field
- Summarising the sequence in which it unfolds, in terms they can understand

This allows all students to follow the text with general understanding as it is read aloud, without having to struggle to work out what is going on at each step, not to struggle to decode letter patterns of unfamiliar words.

We select a factual text to study because it contains information about the topic. But once we have selected a text, the information in it helps us to plan the lesson. Looking closely at a chosen text reveals the background knowledge that students need to understand the text. This background knowledge then becomes part of what you plan to study in the lesson, before coming to read the text. Factual texts are typically studied as part of curriculum subject areas such as Geography, Science, and History. It is important for the teacher to give a summary of what happens in the text, step, by step. During and after reading, key terms and concepts may also be briefly explained, and students’ understandings and experiences may be discussed.

This kind of brief summary can support students to read the text with understanding. They may then read the text for themselves. Paragraph by paragraph reading involves a 3 step cycle. The student’s task is to listen and understand the paragraph as it is read aloud. The teacher prepares by telling them what to expect and elaborates by discussing key points.

With a factual text, the elaboration may also involve directing students to highlight key information in the paragraph for making notes later.
Comprehension:
What Readers Need To Know

LITERAL UNDERSTANDINGS.
These require the student to recall or recognize ideas and facts that are explicitly stated in the material.

Some specific strategies include:
How to:
Retell
Visualize Information
Summarize
Locate specific information and use specific text features such as a table of contents, headings and index to achieve this.
Gain information from visual sources.
Find supportive details
Locate cause and effect
Understand problem/solution
Compare and contrast
Understand a sequence of events or instructions
Recognize main Idea/s
Solve unknown vocabulary. Note: Even though this a strategy that is part of all three branches of understandings, I have placed it under literal understandings. If a reader is unable to solve the meaning of unknown words in the body of the text then it is their literal comprehension that is first compromised. This in turn will have an impact on their abilities to interpret and evaluate.

INTERPRETIVE UNDERSTANDINGS
These require the student to make inferences from the information stated. It calls upon the reader to use not only the information presented in the text but personal knowledge, connections and experiences to make meaning.

Some specific strategies include:
Inferring:
- what will happen (predicting)
- cause and effect
- problem/solution
- main Idea/s
- sequences/events
- comparisons
- information from visual sources

Making Connections
- text to self
- text to text
text to world

You will note that strategies such as cause and effect, problem/solution, sequence of events, comparisons and main idea are both literal and interpretive. When they are explicitly stated in the text they are literal. When they are not stated in the body of the text and require the reader to infer and make connections, they are interpretive.

EVALUATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS

These are understandings where the reader makes judgments as to the content of the material read. As with interpretive meanings, it calls upon the reader to utilize information both explicitly and implicitly stated in the text as well as personal knowledge and experiences. In essence it calls upon the reader to use both literal and interpretive understandings to encourage more complex thinking. Many of these understandings are tied in with area of critical literacy (Luke and Freebody 1997).

Some specific strategies include:
- Synthesize information
- Fact versus opinion
- Reality versus fantasy
- Validity of a piece
- Adequacy of a piece
- Relevance of a piece
- Author bias
- Author intent
- Point of view
- Tools/Craft used by the author to affect thinking
- Making overall judgments on a piece
Questions To Assess/Monitor Comprehension

**Nonfiction piece**
The cheetah is a member of the cat family. It shares this membership with such animals as the lion, panther, tiger and leopard. Although the cheetah is the fastest running mammal, it is not the most powerful. This privilege belongs to the lion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Literal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Explanation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example Fiction</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example Nonfiction</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Asks the reader to recognize and recall specific facts and ideas</td>
<td>What are the names of the main characters in the story?</td>
<td>What is the cheetah a member of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Asks the reader to restate information in their own words</td>
<td>Tell me what happened in your own words?</td>
<td>Tell me about the cheetah in your own words?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Interpretive</strong></th>
<th><strong>Explanation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example Fiction</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example Nonfiction</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive</td>
<td>Asks the reader to make connections and inferences from the information provided</td>
<td>What lesson, if any, is to be learned from this story?</td>
<td>Why do you think the cheetah and the lion belong to the same group of animals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Asks the reader to solve problems from the information given in the text</td>
<td>Have you ever had a problem like that of the person in the story? How did you solve the problem?</td>
<td>If a cheetah met a lion in the wild, What might it do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>Asks the reader to think beyond the body of the text</td>
<td>What do you think happened to the main character after the story ended?</td>
<td>What other information do you think the author will tell us as we read through this book?</td>
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</table>

**Evaluative**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Questions</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<th>Example Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Asks the reader to make judgments about what they have read</td>
<td>Do you think you would enjoy being like the main character. Explain why or why not?</td>
<td>Do you think the author has included enough information about the cheetahs' ability to run fast? Is there other information that you may have included if you had written this piece?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Asks the reader to analysis the way the text has been constructed</td>
<td>How has the writer made this story Humorous?</td>
<td>How has the author organized the information in this text? Does this help the reader gather important facts? Explain why you think this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Based on work by McInnes and Smith (1992)
### Assessment Rubric for Nonfiction Comprehension Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Rubric for Nonfiction Comprehension Skills and Strategies</th>
<th>Key: N: Not in evidence</th>
<th>B: Beginning to show signs of</th>
<th>S: Strengthening</th>
<th>A: Nearly always</th>
<th>N/A: Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date:</strong></td>
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#### Literal Understandings

- Able to retell
- Can summarize information read
- Able to locate information using text features such as table of contents, index and headings
- Can locate cause and effect
- Recognizes main idea/s
- Understands problem/solution
- Locates comparisons and contrasts where explicitly stated.
- Able to gain information from visual sources
- Able to understand a sequence of events or instructions
- Can solve the meaning of unknown vocabulary

#### Interpretive Understandings

- Able to make/change/confirm predictions based on events and facts presented
- Can synthesize information based on facts presented and interpretations.
- Able to visualize information read
- Able to infer cause and effect
- Able to infer main idea
- Able to infer comparisons and contrasts
- Able to infer problem and solution
- Can make inferences on events or sequences.
- Can make inferences from visual sources
- Makes text to self connections
| Makes text to text connections |  |
| Makes text to world connections |  |
| **Evaluative Understandings** |  |
| Aware of author intent/ purpose for a piece |  |
| Knows the difference between reality and fantasy |  |
| Knows the difference between fact and opinion |  |
| Can locate the facts and opinions in a given piece |  |
| Aware of point of view |  |
| Able to compare own point of view with that of the author's |  |
| Able to locate author bias |  |
| Aware of own bias |  |
| Can locate the tools the author has used to present point of view |  |
| Can evaluate the adequacy of a piece |  |
| Can evaluate the validity/relevance of a piece |  |
| Can make overall judgments on a piece |  |