

## Helpful Definitions

**Word attack skills:** Skills needed to be able to make sense of an unknown word in the context of reading. Word attack skills rely on the ability to recognize the sounds that make up words and to put those sounds together (phonemic awareness). More advanced word attack skills involve using context, prefixes or suffixes or a dictionary to determine what a word means. I call this “making and breaking” words—and sentences.

**Phonemic awareness:** Phonemic awareness is a child's ability to recognize, hear and manipulate sounds in spoken language. More specifically, a child who possesses phonemic awareness is able to hear the smaller segments of sounds that make up entire words (for example, identify the first sound in the word "cat") and can blend these segments together to make recognizable words. These small segments are sometimes referred to as *phonemes*.

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## Word-Attack Strategies

Word-attack strategies help students decode, pronounce, and understand unfamiliar words. They help students attack words piece by piece or from a different angle. Model and instruct students:

### Use Picture Clues

- Look at the picture.
- Are there people, objects, or actions in the picture that might make sense in the sentence?

### Sound Out the Word

- Start with the first letter, and say each letter-sound out loud.
- Blend the sounds together and try to say the word. Does the word make sense in the sentence?

### Look for Chunks in the Word

- Look for familiar letter chunks. They may be sound/symbols, prefixes, suffixes, endings, whole words, or base words.
- Read each chunk by itself. Then blend the chunks together and sound out the word. Does that word make sense in the sentence?

### Connect to a Word You Know

- Think of a word that looks like the unfamiliar word.
- Compare the familiar word to the unfamiliar word. Decide if the familiar word is a chunk or form of the unfamiliar word.

- Use the known word in the sentence to see if it makes sense. If so, the meanings of the two words are close enough for understanding.

### **Reread the Sentence**

- Read the sentence more than once.
- Think about what word might make sense in the sentence. Try the word and see if the sentence makes sense.

### **Keep Reading**

- Read past the unfamiliar word and look for clues.
- If the word is repeated, compare the second sentence to the first. What word might make sense in both?

### **Use Prior Knowledge**

- Think about what you know about the subject of the book, paragraph, or sentence.
  - Do you know anything that might make sense in the sentence? Read the sentence with the word to see if it makes sense.
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Of course, reading is not just pronouncing words—it requires understanding. Most experienced readers use a variety of strategies to understand text. Research has shown that teachers can, and should, teach these strategies to beginning readers. The following, additional strategies can help students understand any text in any subject:

### **Make Predictions**

Predictions encourage active reading and keep students interested, whether or not the predictions are correct. Incorrect predictions can signal a misunderstanding that needs to be revisited. Instruct students:

- Look at the pictures, table of contents, chapter headings, maps, diagrams, and features. What subjects are in the book?
- Write down predictions about the text. During reading, look for words or phrases from those predictions.
- While reading, revise the predictions or make new ones.

### **Visualize**

Many students think visually, using shapes, spatial relationships, movement, and colors, and can benefit greatly from this strategy. Instruct students:

- Imagine a fiction story taking place as if it were a movie. Imagine the characters' features. Picture the plot in time and space.
- Imagine processes and explanations happening visually. Use nouns, verbs, and adjectives to create pictures, diagrams, or other mental images.
- Use graphic organizers to lay out information. Make sketches or diagrams on scrap paper.

### **Ask and Answer Questions**

Having students form their own questions helps them recognize confusion and encourages active learning. Instruct students:

- Before reading, think about the subject based on the title, chapter heads, and visual information. Make note of anything you are curious about.
- While reading, pause and write down any questions. Be sure to ask questions if there is confusion.
- Look for the answers while reading. Pause and write down the answers.
- Were all the questions answered? Could the answers come from other sources?

### **Retell and Summarize**

Relating the text in students' own words clears up language issues. Retelling challenges them to aim for complete retention. Summarization allows students to discriminate between main ideas and minor details. Instruct students:

- During reading, note the main ideas or events. Put a check mark in the book or write a note to point out a main idea.
- At the ends of chapters or sections, review the information or story. Note main ideas or events and the details that support them.
- After reading, retell or summarize the text. Focus on the important points, and support them with relevant details.
- Refer to the book to check the retelling or summarization.

### **Connect the Text to Life Experiences, Other Texts, or Prior Knowledge**

Connecting a text to students' experiences and knowledge helps students personalize the information. It also helps students remember information when they link it to their lives. Instruct students:

- Is the subject familiar? Do the characters resemble familiar people? Have you learned about the concept from school, home, or other experiences?
- Is the style or genre familiar? Does it resemble other texts? Television shows, movies, and games can be considered "texts."
- Write down similarities between the current text and experiences, knowledge, or other texts.

