

DOING PREREADING RIGHT!

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Purposes of Prereading (Graves & Graves, 2003; Readence, Moore, & Rickelman, 2000; Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2014)

- Tap into “prior knowledge”
- Motivate reading / viewing / listening
- Contextualize the text
- Provide crucial background / vocabulary
- Give the reader / student advice (as needed)

Problems with Prereading (With thanks to RI)

1. Students do not have the opportunity to experience the text as the author intended.
2. Preparation for reading takes substantial time, sometimes more than the actual reading.
3. The teacher focuses the preview on things that are not key to the text and misses the difficult, more important aspects of the text.
4. Students have no reason to read the text because the teacher essentially has relayed most of what’s in it.
5. Students just skim the text because they are given or they set a narrow purpose for reading (e.g., answer the questions at the end of the chapter, complete a worksheet, find out if something is true). (Shanahan, 2016)

How Did Prereading Go So Far Off Course?

- Research has been misinterpreted. (Shanahan, 2013)
- Our focus has been on teaching rather than on students’ learning. (DuFour and DuFour, 2006)
- More is better. (Pressler, 2016)
- The heat is on. (Morrow, 2014)
- Who has time to reflect? (King, 2002)

How Much Time to Spend on Prereading? (Shanahan, 2014)

1. Consider the **TASK and TEXT**:

- Every text is different. (e.g., Fiction vs. Nonfiction)
- What **ESSENTIAL** background knowledge is *presumed* by the author (but unknown by the reader)?

2. Consider Your **STUDENTS**:

- English Learners – Level of proficiency, home culture, schooling in first language
Beginning – much more support; Intermediate to Advanced – less support
- Low-income students with limited background and vocabulary related to text topic

WHAT IS...?

PREREADING:

- Period before engaging with a text
- Stage setting that precedes shared, guided, or independent reading / viewing / listening of assigned material in ELA and content classes
(Adapted from: shanahan literacy.com/2012/02/pre-reading-or-not-on-premature-demise.html)

TEXT: Digital or print (paper) material, used for learning, including novels, textbooks, nonfiction books, websites, short stories, plays, poems, infographics, videos, and podcasts.

SCAFFOLDING: Supporting students before, during, and / or after they read / view / listen; providing enough help so students can succeed with a task that otherwise would be impossible (Adapted from Graves & Graves, 2005)

When you steal a
student's struggle,
you steal
the learning.
When you
support the

you take that
student
farther than ever.

POSSIBLE DECISIONS ABOUT FREQUENTLY USED PREREADING STRATEGIES

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- RETAIN** *Why will you continue to use the strategy?*
- RETIRE** *Why will you no longer use the strategy?*
- RELOCATE** *Where will you move the strategy, and how might you alter it?*
 - During Reading:** Provide point-of-need support.
 - Postreading:** Facilitate concept review and learning enrichment.
- REFINE** *How will you streamline the strategy? (Duration? Focus? Grouping arrangement? Response options?)*

Prereading Guidelines (Adapted from Rhode Island Comprehensive Literacy Plan and Shanahan, 2014)

- Teachers **must read / preview the text** ahead of time to determine:
 - the **purpose** for the reading
 - what their **students bring** to the text
 - what **prereading information (IF ANY)** should be provided
 - how and when to provide support** to accomplish the reading purpose
- Amount of time spent on prereading should be **brief**, and brevity should be **in proportion to the length of the reading**.
- Prereading should orient students to the text so there is a **desire to read**.
- Prereading **should not reveal information** that students could acquire simply by reading the text.
- Prereading lessons can **focus on unfamiliar key words and concepts** that are likely to be barriers to comprehension of main idea or theme (Point-of-need teaching may be preferable.)
- Purpose setting before reading should be as **non-specific** as possible (e.g., read to find out what happens in this story, read to find out what this author has to say about (topic), read to see if you can retell this later). (Shanahan, 2016)
- Prereading should probably not occur before close reading lessons.
- **Keep the TEXT center stage.**

**Teacher-directed
activation or building of
background knowledge
is NOT needed for
EVERY text.**

We need BALANCE. (With thanks to RI) Ensure that your students:

1. Have opportunities to grapple with complex text **AND**
2. Receive support that will foster deep comprehension and genuine interest in the text.

REFLECT AND DO (With thanks to RI)

- *How can you achieve a balance so that students do more of the cognitive work without “abandoning” them or allowing them to totally “break down”?*
- *What changes will you make in the way you approach prereading?*

DEALING WITH PRIOR KNOWLEDGE DURING READING COMPREHENSION LESSONS (AND SHARED / GUIDED / DIRECTED READING)

by Timothy Shanahan, Ph.D.

1. Don't overdo it. Research shows that providing readers with key information about a text can improve comprehension, as does reminding them of relevant information that they already know. *But in the research studies these things were usually accomplished pretty economically; often the researcher did nothing more than tell students the topic.* To stimulate students to use what they know while reading doesn't take more than this: "We're going to read a story about a family vacation." It does NOT require having each student in the group tell a story about his or her family vacation. Students can make sense of a text without a 15-minute discussion of what they already know about a topic. It's simply not necessary.

2. Respect the reader-text relationship. *Whatever prereading information about a text that you provide should not be information that will be stated or implied by the selection.* It is usually enough to tell students the topic and / or the genre. "This is a history chapter about the American Revolution." Or, "this is a science fiction story." Anything you reveal ahead of time is something students won't have to figure out from reading (which means you are swiping their opportunity to learn).

3. Don't be afraid to fill students in on some "appropriate" background information. Remember, many texts used for teaching were not originally written for students—they may even be texts from another era—so the author may have assumed his or her readers would know certain things; certain things that your students might not know. It's hard to imagine William Shakespeare didn't presume his audience knew Julius Caesar was a Roman emperor. Telling kids that information won't hurt a thing. What Shakespeare didn't bank on was the cultural literacy of the average 21st century American ninth graders, who might not even know there was a Roman empire. *Filling kids in on some of that assumed context is fine.*

4. Excerpts are special. How often do you read chapter 5 of a novel? Obviously that's something most of us don't do. But students are often taught to read from anthologies aimed at providing them a breadth of experience with valuable literary artifacts. There's nothing wrong with that. But excerpts create a special problem for readers—the author has made pertinent information available earlier in the text, but the reader in this case is cut off from that info. *When guiding students to read excerpts, providing them with key information omitted during the excerpting process is appropriate.*

5. Use multiple readings to solve prior knowledge problems. If a text is only going to be read once, and students are to gain full understanding, then conducting a thorough review of existing prior knowledge might seem like a powerful introduction. But what if the "money read" would be the second one, and the first reading would be used to create prior knowledge (i.e., *students would use the knowledge drawn from their first reading go through to buttress their second reading*).

6. Culturally different students may benefit from a different prior knowledge input. Not all kids know the same things. And there's not much we can do about that. However, you might

have students from particular cultural groups who may lack key information because of their background. What is it that Guatemalan or Chinese immigrant children may not know about the culture shown in a particular text? Or if native English speakers are reading about Guatemalan or Chinese culture, what would they need to know to make sense of that material?

7. Only deal with prior knowledge if it is likely to raise a comprehension problem. Years ago, Hansen and Pearson showed the value of focusing kids on topics relevant to the comprehension issues at hand rather than to the text topics themselves. Thus, if the point of the text is to explore the nature of friendship, inventorying what students know about Europe isn't likely to help even if the friendship in the story takes place in Europe. *Not all prior knowledge is equal when it comes to making sense of a text.*

8. Prior knowledge issues can be addressed during and after reading. I often read about topics I don't know about, and it isn't much of a problem. What I don't grasp right away, I can often figure out from the text itself. I rarely look up information prior to reading, but I might fill some gaps with Google *along the way* or I may do that *after* the reading. *Avoid exploring what kids know ahead of time if it will spoil the reading* (Point 7 above suggests focusing on the key ideas, but if done before reading it may simply be revealing what the text is really about.) During reading, I might ask students questions. If they are missing a key point and don't seem able to grasp it, I can ask a question about their awareness of some outside information that may jump start their thinking ("Have you ever been called a name like that? How did it make you feel?"—that's a sequence of questions that would stimulate the use of prior knowledge at a key point in the story without taking kids too far afield).

9. Do not focus on prior knowledge for texts that present information that will challenge readers' current concepts. Science texts often tell us things that run counter to our perceptions of the world. A famous example is the explanation of the path of a falling ball dropped by a runner; the actual path runs counter to most people's expectations. Some teachers want to get kids to predict the paths—to apply their prior knowledge—to prepare for reading. But that's a bad idea because it increases the chance students won't grasp the explanation. *Prior knowledge is a two-edged sword—it can increase learning and it can encourage readers to impose their own beliefs on a text.*

10. Analogies are a powerful way to bring prior knowledge to bear on a text. Just because I don't know much about a topic doesn't mean I don't know anything that's relevant. For example, I know next to nothing about cricket. But I do know some things about baseball that I might be able to use to try to understand an article on cricket. And if I didn't happen to be a long-suffering Cubs fan? Then, I'd use what I know about games or sports competitions to help me make sense of the article. I might not know how one scores in cricket, but I suspect scoring is important—it is a game—so I'd use that insight to guide my attention toward how one scores. *Prior knowledge does not have to be specific knowledge—another good reason not to send students off to inventory what they already know about a subject; that's overkill.*

(Adapted from: <http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2014/11/prior-knowledge-part-2.html>)

DECISION CHART FOR PREREADING ACTIVITIES

(These strategies may have different names and be used in other ways. Inclusion in this this list does NOT imply endorsement.)

STRATEGY	HOW IT WORKS	Re- tain	Re- tire	Relocate	Refine
1. <i>Brainstorming</i>	Students generate a list of things they already know about text topic.				
2. <i>Give One, Get One</i>	Students list their prior knowledge in the "Give One" column. Then they move around the classroom and exchange ideas with peers, writing down the new information they get in the "Get One" column.				
3. <i>ABC Brainstorming</i>	Students think about the topic and try to come up with a word or phrase (related to the topic) that starts with each letter.				
4. <i>PreP (Prereading Plan)</i>	1) Students share what they know about the topic and teacher writes the information on chart paper. 2) Students share what made them think of their responses. 3) Teacher asks students to share the new ideas they gleaned from the activity.				
5. <i>Exclusion Brainstorming</i>	Teacher provides a list of words students "might encounter while reading." Students predict which words will be in the text.				
6. <i>Think / Write-Pair-Share</i>	Students ponder a question or write down ideas about the text topic and then get with a partner to discuss their ideas.				
7. <i>Admit Slip</i>	At the start of the lesson, students individually jot down what they know about a topic, what is confusing, etc.				
8. <i>Journaling/ Quick Writes</i>	Students respond to a prompt related to the theme / topic of the text.				
9. <i>Expectation Grid</i>	Students are given a chart with boxes for subtopics related to the reading. Students write what they already know in relation to each subtopic.				
10. <i>Semantic Mapping</i>	Teacher gives students a graphic showing the relationships among key concepts (terms) in the reading.				
11. <i>Graphic Organizer</i>	Teacher provides a visual representation of important information from the reading.				
12. <i>Group Discussion</i>	Students talk about prior learning / experiences related to the text.				
13. <i>Character Quotes</i>	Teacher distributes quotes from various characters in the upcoming story and asks students to predict what the characters are like.				
14. <i>Organizing Questions</i>	Students are given questions to answer via reading.				
15. <i>Reading Prior to Reading</i>	Students read easier materials before reading the assigned text or an informational text that relates to the narrative they will be reading.				
16. <i>Real Objects / Models</i>	Teacher shows items that relate to the reading and explains them to the class.				
17. <i>Videos/Image/ Visuals</i>	Teacher shows video excerpts or photos / drawings that illustrate concepts in the reading.				
18. <i>Predict-O-Gram</i>	Students are given a list of terms from the text and asked to decide which aspect of the story (Setting, Characters, Action, Problem, Solution, Other Things) each term relates to.				
19. <i>Knowledge Rating</i>	Students analyze how familiar they are with 8-10 key terms from the text they will be reading.				
20. <i>Mini-Lesson</i>	Teacher supplies pertinent background information.				
21. <i>Preview / Summary</i>	Teacher shares a passage that summarizes the reading.				

TEXT-CENTERED PREREADING ACTIVITIES

(Adapted from <https://k12teacherstaffdevelopment.com/tlb/the-importance-of-pre-reading-activities>)

- Discussing new vocabulary and trying to attach it to something students already know.
 - Asking students what they know about the topic and from where that information came.
 - Looking at the subtitles and asking students to consider anything they know about them.
 - Examining the pictures and captions to learn more about what the text is going to say.
 - Checking the graphs and maps to discover how they might add meaning to the text.
 - Looking at the bold words in the upcoming reading.
 - Analyzing who wrote the text and the audience for whom it was originally written.
 - Reading the entire first paragraph and asking students what they now know about the text.
 - Reading the last paragraph and asking students what they now know about the text.
 - Reading the first sentence or first two lines in each paragraph and asking students what they now know about the text.
 - Asking students to write a question that they anticipate will be answered in the text.
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SELECTED RESOURCES

Common Core Standards Ignite Debate Over Prereading

www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/04/25/29prereading_ep.h31.html

Shanahan on Literacy (Dr. Tim Shanahan's blog)

www.shanahanonliteracy.com



Shanahan, T. (2013, Fall). Letting the text take center stage: How the Common Core State Standards will transform English arts education. *American Educator*, 4-11 and 43.

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Shanahan.pdf

“I would rather be poor in a cottage full of books
than a king without the desire to read.” -Thomas Babington Macaulay