



## LITERACY

# Aiding Reading Comprehension With Post-Its

A simple, low-stress strategy that helps students engage with, understand, and remember what they read.

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Students frequently complain that they don't remember what they read. In the past, when I would ask about their reading practices, they often recounted that they would get to the bottom of a page of text and realize they had no clue about what they had just read.

I sought strategies to address this problem: What could students do to stay engaged with the reading, find it more pleasurable, and effectively remember what they read?

## **Storing Memory With Patterns**

Understanding and remembering texts, as with all new memory construction, involves connecting the new to the known (i.e., using existing memory networks). The brain does this linking through its system of storing memory in neural networks based on relational patterns. When exposed to new information, the brain evaluates it using patterns it has developed through time and experience. Optimal brain engagement, understanding, and storage occur when new information is identified as being related to an existing memory pattern such as a category or schema.

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## **Engagement and Memory**

Successful reading comprehension makes use of pattern linking strategies. These include activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and recognizing personal relevance to interests, past positive experiences, or goals.

Discussing purposeful reading goals before assigning a reading task helps students recall prior related memories in long-term memory storage and increases awareness of how the reading may be personally relevant. Making predictions enhances students' interest by encouraging curiosity. Making predictions also encourages the brain to stay attentive and engaged as students actively think about what they read, and construct meaning, understanding, and linkages to durable memory circuits.

## **Talking Back to the Text With Post-it Notes**

I developed an interactive reading strategy using Post-it notes and writing prompts to help my students engage with, understand, and remember what they read. The strategy uses the general principles of patterning and linking the new to the known. Because it induces students to activate prior knowledge, make predictions, and relate the book to their lives, it promotes their reading comprehension and memory.

As educators, we know the strategies that make successful readers. However, we also know that even when we suggest strategies such as predicting and making personal connections both before and during independent reading, most students are unlikely to use them.

One way to push students to use these strategies for independent reading homework (or classwork during independent, group, or whole-class reading) is to give them prompts and Post-its in advance of the reading. The assignment is to simply complete each prompt on a single Post-it.

This process is appealing in several ways. There are no wrong answers, and the assignment requires very little writing as it has already been started on each Post-it in class—so this activity is low stress and high outcome as it upholds the general principles of reading comprehension.

## Sample Post-it Prompts

In these prompts, the students address the text directly—by calling it “you”—as though they were having a conversation with it.

### To be completed before reading for prediction and preview:

- I think you'll be telling me...
- I already know things about you, so I predict...

### To be completed after briefly skimming the assigned pages:

- What does the heading for this section suggest about what will come?
- What does this picture (graph, diagram, etc.) suggest about this reading topic?

### To be completed during reading as a response to what is read:

- You're similar to what I've learned before, because you remind me of...
- I would have preferred a picture of... (Students can also sketch, describe, or download a picture, graph, or diagram)
- This is not what I expected, which was...
- This gives me an idea for...
- I want to know more about...
- This information could be useful to me because I'm interested in...
- I think this will be on the test because...

## Why This Works

The benefits of reading with an explicit plan for engagement, comprehension, and memory include greater class comfort and participation, greater understanding of what is read, increased memory of the text, and a reduction in the amount of rereading or review needed for test time.

The use of Post-its increases memory pattern linkages, understanding, and the pleasure of reading. As students become more skilled readers through strategies that promote pattern seeking and linking, they build their independent skills about how to think actively about the text—their metacognitive skills.

They will not only have increased pleasure, motivation, curiosity, and engagement, but will also develop stronger confidence in their own abilities as well as resilience, intrinsic motivation, and perseverance. You will be increasing the access of all students to the rich world of written information and imagination that is available in books, newspapers, magazines, online reading, and even on boxes of cereal.

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