

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Helping your child understand — not just read — the words on the page

A free introduction from Why Play Learning

What Is Reading Comprehension?

Once a child can decode words — that is, sound them out and read them aloud — the next important step is understanding what those words actually mean together. This is called **reading comprehension**, and it's the heart of truly being a reader.

It's perfectly possible for a child to read a passage fluently and yet have very little idea what it was about. Comprehension skills need to be taught and practised just as carefully as phonics — and the good news is, you can build them through simple, enjoyable conversations around any book you share together.

■ **You don't need to turn reading into a test. A relaxed chat about a story — before, during, and after reading — is one of the most powerful things you can do.**

Six Key Strategies to Try at Home

These strategies are used by skilled readers naturally — and children can learn them too, with a little gentle guidance. You don't need to use all of them at once. Pick one or two that suit the book you're reading and see how your child responds.

■ Making Predictions

Before or during reading, encourage your child to guess what might happen next. This gets them thinking ahead and investing in the story. There are no wrong answers — the thinking is what matters.

Try asking: "What do you think is going to happen next? Why do you think that?"

■■ Visualising

Good readers paint pictures in their minds as they read. Ask your child to describe what they can 'see' in their imagination. This deepens engagement and helps with understanding descriptive language.

Try asking: "Can you picture where this is happening? What does it look like in your head?"

■ Asking Questions

Encourage your child to wonder about the text — not just answer your questions, but ask their own. Curious readers are engaged readers. Model this yourself: 'I wonder why the character did that...'

Try asking: "Is there anything that puzzles you? What would you like to know more about?"

■ Making Connections

Linking the story to their own life, to other books, or to the wider world helps children make meaning. These connections don't need to be clever — even 'that reminds me of our dog' is comprehension at work.

Try asking: "Does anything in this story remind you of something you've experienced or seen?"

■ Summarising

After reading, ask your child to tell you what happened in their own words. Keeping it to the key points (rather than every detail) is a skill in itself — and it shows you what they've understood.

Try asking: "Can you tell me what the most important things that happened were?"

■ Inferring

Inference is reading between the lines — understanding things the author implies but doesn't state directly. This is one of the richest comprehension skills. Start simply: 'How do you think the character is feeling right now?'

Try asking: "How do you think the character felt? What makes you think that?"

A Simple Framework: Before, During, and After

A great way to use these strategies is to think of reading in three stages. You don't need to do all of this every time — even one or two questions makes a difference.

Before reading	Look at the cover together. What do you predict it might be about? What do you already know about this topic or type of story?
During reading	Pause at natural moments. Ask what they think will happen next, or how a character might be feeling. Let them ask questions too.
After reading	Chat about what happened. What was their favourite part? Did anything surprise them? What would they change if they were the author?

Reading together is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child. These strategies aren't about testing — they're about sharing, wondering, and enjoying stories side by side. Keep it light, keep it warm, and let your child's curiosity lead the way. ■