

Experienced and Inexperienced Readers: Behaviors and Attitudes

Faced with the challenge of reading a text assigned in one of our classes, experienced readers will use a set of skills that inexperienced readers have yet to learn. Below is a brief, generalized description of the difference in approaches.

(Source: Joan Wong, Lecture, English 715, Jan. 2007)

Before reading a text, experienced readers will . . .

- Activate background knowledge (for example, consider what they know about the topic);
- Make sure they understand the task, set a purpose, and make predictions;
- Choose appropriate reading strategies.

Before reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

- Start reading without preparation;
- Start reading without knowing why or only when prompted;
- Read every single piece of text in the same way.

During reading, experienced readers will . . .

- Focus their attention and anticipate text content;
- Monitor their comprehension;
- Use “fix-up” strategies (strategies to help them engage actively with the text and comprehend it more fully);
- Use context to help their comprehension;
- Use their knowledge of the text’s structure and organization to help comprehension;
- Organize and integrate new information.

During reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

- Become easily distracted;
- Read to just “get it done”;
- Not realize that they aren’t understanding the text;
- Not know to use “fix-up” strategies;
- Not recognize key vocabulary;
- Not see organizational patterns in the text;
- Add on, rather than integrate, new information.

After reading, experienced readers will . . .

- Reflect on what they read;

- Feel successful as a result of their effort;
- Be able to summarize the main ideas;
- Know to seek additional information or confirmation from other sources.

After reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

- Stop reading and thinking about the text;
- Assume any success they feel is a result of luck;
- Fixate on the minor details;
- Not necessarily know to seek additional information or confirmation from other sources.

Teaching Reading Skills

To help inexperienced readers learn the skills they need to be more successful, the National Reading Panel (in *Teaching Children to Read*, Reports of the Subgroups, 2000) recommends that teachers help them engage in . . .

- Comprehension monitoring (metacognitive strategies);
- Cooperative learning (such as group work);
- Using graphic and semantic organizers (to understand text structure);
- Recognizing story structure;
- Question answering;
- Question generating;
- Summarizing.

Dr. Helen Gillotte-Tropp (English Department, SFSU) also adds that teachers should . . .

- Be transparent (always explain “why”);
- Provide time for reflection (think about what we have learned and why a given strategy worked);
- Activate schema.