

Monitoring and Clarifying

Definition: Monitoring and clarifying is a strategy that enables students to identify where meaning breaks down while reading and then apply appropriate “fix-up” strategies to better comprehend (Tompkins, 2003).

Task Analysis:

- 1) Students must understand that print conveys meaning.
- 2) Students must understand that the ultimate goal of reading is to comprehend.
- 3) Students must be able to process what they are reading.
- 4) Students must have a variety of “fix-up” strategies.

Meaning can break down at various levels: schema, word, sentence/phrase, and paragraph (Keene, Zimmermann, 1997). Begin by explaining to students that it is important when they read to pay close attention to what the words are telling them so that when they discover that they do not understand, they can use different strategies to “fix-up” the confusion.

Define the terms **monitor** and **clarify** for students. Tell them that when they **monitor** they are checking to make sure that they understand or not understand; when they don’t understand they **clarify** or use strategies to try to make the meaning clear. In the most simplistic terms, to monitor is to ask oneself, “**Do I understand?**” and to clarify is to ask, “**What am I going to DO to understand?**”

Explain further that there are many different levels where they can get confused and then comprehension breaks down. Tell students that as they monitor they identify these points and must know what to do to “fix” the problem so that they can make meaning and continue to read.

Offer students examples of each of the different levels where meaning breaks down and a clarifying question that might ensue. Have students brainstorm possible “fix-up” strategies such as those listed in the table below.

Level Where Comprehension Broke Down	Clarifying Question	Fix-up Strategy
<p style="text-align: center;">Schema</p> <p>(background knowledge) Before reading you may realize that you don’t know anything about the topic.</p>	What is a wombat?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look up Wombats in a book, encyclopedia, Internet, dictionary, etc • Use QAR • Preview the text
<p style="text-align: center;">Word</p> <p>While reading you come across a word you cannot pronounce.</p>	How do I read this word?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunking—affixes, base words, syllables • Blending • Word families

<p style="text-align: center;">Word</p> <p>While reading you come across a word you do not recognize.</p>	<p>What does this word mean?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roots • Context clues • Word parts • Dictionary, thesaurus
<p style="text-align: center;">Phrase/Sentence</p> <p>While reading you notice that you are confused by something a character/person does.</p>	<p>Why did the Colonists dump tea into Boston Harbor?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Read ahead • Use resources • Use pictures, headings, QAR
<p style="text-align: center;">Paragraph</p> <p>While reading you realize that you do not fully grasp the concept of the paragraph.</p>	<p>What was the main idea? What did I need to learn from that paragraph?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Use resources • Use pictures, headings, QAR • Read a more simplified text • Text structure

Make a chart such as the preceding, so students can refer to it while monitoring. As students monitor and clarify ask them to add any new “fix-up” strategies to the list that helped them clarify meaning. As you teach new skills and strategies, ask students at what level these would help clarify meaning and then add them to your list.

Once students have a strong understanding of monitoring and an ample list of “fix-up” strategies, model for them how to monitor and clarify through a shared reading. Help students to see the connection between their break down in comprehension and the “fix-up” strategy used for clarification through “think alouds.”

“Many of the organisms that are commonly called seaweeds are brown algae. In addition to their brown pigment...” (*Science Explorer, Focus on Life Science, “Protists,”* 2001, pg. 279).

Teacher: I have a clarifying question, “What does *pigment* mean?” My meaning has broken down at the “word” level for understanding. As I look at the fix-up strategy chart, I think that I will try to reread the sentence and keep reading to the end to see if I can figure out what it means from the other words around it.

Teacher: “Many of the organisms that are commonly called seaweeds are brown algae. In addition to their brown pigment, brown algae also contain green, yellow, and orange pigments” (*Science Explorer, Focus on Life Science, “Protists,”* 2001, pg. 279).

Teacher: The sentence tells me that *brown* algae has *brown* pigments and *green, yellow, and orange* pigments. All of these are colors, so maybe “pigment” means the color of something. I don’t think that I am 100% sure so I better choose another fix-up strategy. I think that I will look

at the diagram in the text. When I look at this picture it looks like the algae is green, orange, and brown in color. I am pretty sure that "pigment" must mean color. Now I will reread the sentence and substitute the word "color" for the word "pigment" and see if it makes sense.

Teacher: "Many of the organisms that are commonly called seaweeds are brown algae. In addition to their brown [color], brown algae also contain green, yellow, and orange [color]" (*Science Explorer, Focus on Life Science, "Protists,"* 2001, pg. 279).

Teacher: That makes sense now, especially if I think about the seaweed that I have seen at the beach. I can now summarize. Brown algae, or seaweeds, are actually a mixture of brown, orange, green, and yellow. Ok, I can continue reading now.

Using a chart such as the one above, model for students how to chart the level where meaning broke down (word), the clarifying question asked (How do I pronounce this word?), and the fix-up strategies applied (syllables, blending, rereading). This will help students learn how to effectively keep track of their monitoring.

Teacher then continues: "As you can see in Figure 10, a typical brown [*alga*]..."

Teacher: I have another clarifying question, "How do I pronounce this word?" My meaning has broken down at the "word" level for reading. As I look at the fix-up strategy chart I think that looking at affixes and bases might help me. I know that I have been reading about algae. My topic has not changed. Figure 10 shows me a picture of algae. I wonder if this is a form of the word *algae*. If I look at the sentence and use the context it does say "a typical brown..." So this is probably the singular form of the word. I can use what I know about the word *algae* to pronounce this new word. I think the *g* is soft, but I am not sure about the *a* - is it "uh" or "ay." I will say it both ways and see which sounds right, "al-jay/al-juh." Hmmmm... will it matter if I say it the wrong way? Probably not, so I'll just choose which one sounds best to me and read it that way in the sentence.

Teacher: "As you can see in Figure 10, a typical brown [al-juh] has many plantlike structures. Holdfasts anchor the [al-juh] to rocks" (*Science Explorer, Focus on Life Science, "Protists,"* 2001, pg. 279).

List the following on the chart and continue to model for students. Encourage students to interject when they feel meaning has broken down. Help them to verbalize the level where meaning has broken down, the clarifying question they need to ask, and what "fix-up" strategies they think are appropriate for this situation.

After modeling for your students sufficiently, begin to facilitate their ability to monitor as they read by giving them small segments and talking them through the segment sentence by sentence. This can be differentiated for your proficient readers using more difficult text or having them "click," being able to restate or explain what the sentence means (I can summarize), and "clunk," (I am confused) being able to identify what they don't understand at the paragraph or page level. For sentences that "click," students can record a paraphrased version of the sentence in their journal or a summary of the page. For sentences that "clunk," students should record the

sentence that caused the confusion for them and indicate the level where comprehension broke down and the type of clarifying question they need to formulate.

“Anthony led a campaign to change laws regarding the property rights of women. She wrote in her diary that no woman could ever be free without a ‘purse of her own.’ After forming a network to cover the entire state of New York, she collected more than 6,000 signatures to petition for a new property-rights law. In 1860, due largely to the efforts of Anthony, New York finally gave married women ownership of their wages and property. Other states in the Northeast and Midwest soon created similar laws” (*Holt, United States History, “Women’s Rights,”* 2006, pg. 427).

(The “click, clunk” terms were gotten from Reading Rockets, 2006)

Page Number	“Clicks” (summarize).	“Clunks” (confusion)	Level Comprehension Broke Down	Clarifying Question	Fix-up Strategies
Pg. 427	Susan B. Anthony wanted to change laws.	“laws regarding the property rights of women”	Phrase	What are “laws regarding property rights?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections • Reread previous paragraph • Keep reading
Pg. 427		“a purse of her own”	Phrase	What does “a purse of her own” mean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep reading • Reread previous paragraph • Connections
Pg. 427		“no woman could ever be free without a purse of her own”	Phrase	What does freedom have to do with purses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections
Pg. 427		“petition”	Word (vocabulary)	What does “petition” mean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossary • Connections • Dictionary • Context clues
Pg. 427	Anthony formed a big network for New York and got a lot of signatures for a new				

	property-right law.				
Pg. 427	In 1860, New York let married women have control of their own things and earnings.				
Pg. 427	Other states soon had the same laws for women.				

Next have students work together in teams to identify possible “fix-up” strategies to help clarify those areas where meaning broke down. Once they have identified the strategies, have them record the strategy on their chart and apply it. Monitor students as they use the strategies to clarify. Then direct all students to *reread* the page to ensure improved comprehension.

Continue to work closely with students as they learn to monitor and clarify. Hold students accountable for their monitoring through the use of charts or journal entries such as the one above. As students become more proficient with monitoring and clarifying, have students indicate where meaning breaks down on a response board, post-it, or with a highlighter. Students should always be asked to indicate their clarifying question, the level where meaning broke down, and what fix-up strategies they applied.

Students can use comprehension strategies and skills to monitor their comprehension. Clarification would then be needed if students were not able to use the strategy for that segment of the text. For example, if students were summarizing and could not summarize that section of the text they would have to identify where the meaning broke down and then apply “fix-up” strategies to help them then be able to summarize. Below is a table of comprehension strategies and their possible clarifying questions.

Comprehension Strategy/Skill	Clarifying questions	Fix-up strategies
Summarize	Who is the main character? Where is the setting? What was the problem? What was the solution? What was the main point of the section? What happened at the beginning, middle and end?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Note details
Retell	Who are the characters? What are the settings? What was the sequence of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Sketch a story map or story board

	events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the story on tape
Predict (inference)	<p>What happened before? What do I know about the situation? What do I know about the characters?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Access background knowledge • Read additional materials on the subject • Identify character traits • Identify/analyze key elements to plot
Character Traits (inference)	<p>What did the character do? What did the character say? How can I describe this person?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim/scan • Read ahead • Reread • Use reference materials • Identify someone with similar traits • QAR
Main idea (inference)	<p>What was this passage mostly about? What did I learn from this passage?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note details • Reread • Make an outline • Use a graphic organizer • QAR • Analyze pictures, headings, diagrams • Text structure
Theme (inference)	<p>What was the message the author was conveying? What did I learn about human nature?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List pivotal plot points • Reread • Access background knowledge • Identify character traits • Chart relationships between characters and story outcome
Cause and Effect (inference)	<p>What happened before? What happened after? What events lead up to the situation? Why did that happen?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • QAR • Skim/scan • Background knowledge • Graphic organizer • Read additional materials on the topic • Text structure

Text Connections	<p>What happened in the text? What characters traits were exhibited? What was the problem/solution? How is my life similar? What other books have I read that are similar? How does this text reflect real life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background knowledge • Reread • Use resources • Class discussions
Visualization	<p>How can I describe this? What does the character do or say? How does the character look? What does the setting look like? What happened in this portion of the text? What does this look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split screen • Picture cues • Vocabulary development • Use resources • Sketch • Identify adjectives • Reread • Text structures
Synthesis	<p>What did I learn by reading this? What generalizations can I make? What advice would I give to others after reading this? How can I use this information to help me in the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Class discussions • Read additional materials on the topic • Review pivotal plot points • Review theme • Note details • Skim/scan • Background knowledge • Read further • QAR
Evaluation	<p>Did I like this text? Do I agree with the character's actions? Did I like the solution? Would I recommend this book to a friend? Was this book valuable to read?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread • Skim/scan • Class discussion • Read ahead • Make connections • Text structure • Read further • Read additional materials on topic • Review pivotal plot points • Pictures, diagrams, headings

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