

Prior Knowledge: Activating the 'Known'

Explain the Benefit of Using Prior Knowledge to Understand a Reading Passage:

Tell students that recalling their prior experiences ("their own life") can help them to understand the content of their reading. New facts make sense only when we connect them to what we already know.

Demonstrate the Text Prediction Strategy. Select a sample passage and use a "think-aloud" approach to show students how to use the text-prediction strategy

Prompt Students to Think About 'What and Why': Describe what strategy you are about to apply and the reason for doing so. You might say, for example, "I am about to read a short article on public schools in Japan. Before I read the article, though, I should think about my life experiences and what they might tell me about the topic that I am about to read about. By thinking about my own life, I will better understand the article."

Preview Main Ideas from the Reading and Pose Prior Knowledge and Prediction Questions. One at a time, pose three main ideas that appear in the article or story. For each key idea, present one question requiring that readers tap their own prior knowledge of the topic and another that prompts them to predict how the article or story might deal with the topic.

Here is a typical question cycle, composed of a main idea statement, prior knowledge question, prediction question, and student opportunity to write a response.

- "The article that we are going to read describes how different the writing system used in Japanese schools is from our own writing system" [A main idea from the passage].
- "What are your own attitudes and experiences about writing?" [prior knowledge question] Answer this question aloud, and then encourage students to respond.
- "What do you think that the article will say about the Japanese writing system?" [prediction question] Answer this question aloud, and then seek student responses.
- "Now, write down your own ideas about what you think the article will say about the Japanese writing system." [student written response] As students write their own responses, model for them by writing out your answer to the question on the overhead transparency.
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Assign Students to Read the Story or Article Independently. Once you have presented three main ideas and students have responded to all questions, have them read the selection independently.

Step 2: When students have learned the Text Prediction strategy, use it regularly to introduce new reading assignments.

Use Text Prediction to Prepare Students for Homework Reading. You can apply the Text Prediction strategy to boost student comprehension of homework reading assignments. When assigning the homework passages, take students through the steps in the strategy. Then require that students take their own written predictions home to compare to their actual reading.

Transition from Group to Individual Application of the Strategy. As your students become proficient in applying the strategy, you can gradually train them to use the strategy independently. As the instructor, you might hand out the three main ideas for a story and then direct students to take each idea and write out (1) a short account of their own experiences with the topic, and (2) a prediction of what the article or story will say about the main idea. You can collect these written assignments to monitor student understanding and follow-through in using the technique.