



## 3 Levels of Reading

Comprehension is understanding what is being said or read. When it comes to reading, it is an active process that must be developed if a learner is to become a proficient reader. Effective reading skill development is further accomplished when the learner becomes proficient in literal, inferential and critical comprehensive reading.

### First Level

**Literal Comprehension = what the author is actually saying.**

The first level, **literal comprehension**, is the most obvious. Comprehension at this level involves surface meanings. At this level, teachers can ask students to find information and ideas that are explicitly stated in the text. In addition, it is also appropriate to test vocabulary.

"being able to read for literal meanings ie stated ideas is influenced by one's mastery of word meanings in context".

The reader needs to understand ideas and information explicitly stated in the reading material. Some of this information is in the form of recognizing and recalling facts, identifying the main idea, supporting details, categorizing, outlining, and summarizing. The reader is also locating information, using context clues to supply meaning, following specific directions, following a sequence, identifying stated conclusion, and identifying explicitly stated relationships and organizational patterns. These organizational patterns can include cause and effect as well as comparison and contrast. For example, some questions and activities may include:

What words state the main idea of the story?  
How does the author summarize what she/he is saying?  
Outlining the first paragraph of the story.  
What happened first, second and last?  
How are these things alike? How are they different?  
What things belong together?  
What happened?  
What are important dates?  
What are the stated facts?

### Second Level

**Inferential/Interpretive comprehension = what the author means by what is said.**

The second level or strand is **interpretive or referential comprehension**. At this level, students go beyond what is said and read for deeper meanings. They must be able to read critically and analyze carefully what they have read. Students need to be able to see relationships among ideas, for example

how ideas go together and also see the implied meanings of these ideas. It is also obvious that before our students can do this, they have to first understand the ideas that are stated (literal comprehension). Interpretive or referential comprehension includes thinking processes such as drawing conclusions, making generalizations and predicting outcomes. At this level, teachers can ask more challenging questions such as asking students to do the following:

- Re-arrange the ideas or topics discussed in the text.
- Explain the author's purpose of writing the text.
- Summarize the main idea when this is not explicitly stated in the text.
- Select conclusions which can be deduced from the text

The reader must simply read between the lines and make inferences about things not directly stated. Again these inferences are made in the main idea, supporting details, sequence, and cause and effect relationships. Inferential comprehension could also involve interpreting figurative language, drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes, determining the mood, and judging the author's point of view. The following questions are usually asked:

What does the author value?

What is the theme?

What effect does this character/event have on the story?

How do you think this story will end?

## Third Level

**Critical/Applied Comprehension = why the author says what he or she says.**

Finally, the third level of comprehension is **critical reading** whereby ideas and information are evaluated. Critical evaluation occurs only after our students have understood the ideas and information that the writer has presented. At this level, students can be tested on the following skills:

- The ability to differentiate between facts and opinions.
- The ability to recognize persuasive statements.
- The ability to judge the accuracy of the information given in the text.

This high level of comprehension requires the reader to use some external criteria from his/her own experience in order to evaluate the quality, values of the writing, the author's reasoning, simplifications, and generalizations. The reader will react emotionally and intellectually with the material. Because everyone's life experiences are varied, answers to some of the following questions will vary:

Could this possibly happen?

Is this argument logical?

What alternatives are there?

Is this a fact or an opinion?

Do you agree or disagree with the author?

What is the best solution to this problem?

To conclude, literal, inferential and critical comprehensive reading is what makes a skilled, strong reader. This skill must be learned and developed. It does not just happen. With that thought in mind, it has also been shown that strong readers make good writers. Sustained exposure to the English language does allow for an expanded vocabulary and knowledge of correct grammar usage. When this is combined with literal, inferential and critical reading experiences, it enables writers to better express themselves.