

# MIRA Reading Comprehension Strategies for High-School

## Helping Your Teen Become a Confident, Independent Reader

High-school texts can place heavy demands on students—complex ideas, longer assignments, and unfamiliar vocabulary can make reading feel overwhelming. For teens who struggle with reading, comprehension can become frustrating and discouraging. This handout provides practical strategies parents can use at home to help their students break down demanding text and build confidence, understanding, and stamina.

### What Makes High-School Reading Hard?

- Abstract Ideas: require higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, synthesis
- Complex Arguments: ask students to follow claims, evidence, author's purpose, and bias
- Multiple Viewpoints: require students to track different perspectives, timelines, concepts
- Long Assignments: demand stamina, planning, & the ability to manage multi-step tasks
- Vocabulary, Background Knowledge, Fluency Gaps: makes comprehension harder across subjects
- Many teens can show what they understand when they are given tools to organize, process, and break down their ideas

### Before Reading: Set Your Teen Up for Success

*(3-5 minute introductory routine can make a big difference)*

- Preview the Text: skim headings, subheadings, & bolded terms; look at charts, pictures, diagrams; read the first & last paragraph<sup>1,2</sup>
- Identify Purpose: Ask – why are we reading this? What do you think the author wants us to understand?<sup>2</sup>
- Pre-teach Key Vocabulary: choose 3-5 words frequently encountered from the text to explicitly teach<sup>1,3</sup>
- Build Background Knowledge – briefly discuss the topic, use a map, timeline, image, or a brief video<sup>2,3</sup>
- Use a Graphic Organizer (K-W-L chart, concept map, prediction chart, section summary chart, or Cornell notes template) to create a visual roadmap, anchor information, and reduce overwhelm<sup>1</sup>

### During Reading: Keep Your Teen Engaged

- Use Annotation Symbols (✓ ? ! →):
  - ✓ = important,
  - ? = confusing,
  - ! = surprising,
  - = cause/effect, evidence, or connection
- Chunking Text: Break long passages into smaller sections; For each chunk ask – What's the main point here? Or What is the author trying to say?<sup>2,4</sup>
- Margin Notes: Encourage short notes in the margins or on sticky notes like – This supports the argument..., This contradicts earlier info..., This connects to...I need to reread...<sup>2</sup>
- Audio Support: Have student listen & follow along while others read aloud or with an audio version of the text. This helps with focus, fluency, stamina, and understanding complex sentences. This is a support, not a shortcut.

### **After Reading: Strengthen Understanding**

- Summaries: write or dictate one sentence per paragraph or section; use Cornell notes or a short section summary
- Discussions: conversation deepens comprehension – Ask: What was the author’s main point? Or What evidence did the author use? Or Do you agree with the argument? Why/why not?<sup>2</sup>
- Real-life Connections: help teen connect to real life through linking to current events, personal experiences, other books or school subjects

### **Targeted Support for Struggling Readers**

- Vocabulary Practice: teach essential academic words; create a personal glossary or word wall; use flashcards or digital flashcards (Quizlet)<sup>1,3</sup>
- Morphology Practice: teach roots, prefixes, suffixes, and related word forms<sup>3,5</sup>
- Fluency Support: Read aloud together (take turns, chorus read out loud, repeated reading); Use audiobooks; practice short passages daily
- Working Memory Scaffolds: Use graphic organizers, break tasks into steps together, provide visual reminders
- Decoding Refreshers: Use short discreet practice (10-15 minutes a day)

### **Executive Function Supports**

*(Many teens struggle more with organization than comprehension)*

- Checklists: Preview text, Annotate each section, Write summary
- Timers: Read for 10-15 minutes then take a break
- Models of Finished Work: Show examples of annotated pages, completed graphic organizers, Cornell notes, quality summaries
- Weekly goals: What is one strategy I want to focus on using consistently this week?

### **Tracking Progress**

- Skill trackers: Have student use them, and review periodically to see patterns of usage and improvement
- Rubrics with Clear Descriptors: to show what clear growth looks like
- Strategy Menus: Students can choose from a list and check off which ones they use, building independence
- Weekly reflections: Journal or short conversation - What helped me most this week? What felt easier? What is one goal for next week?

### **Encouragement Matters**

Teens often feel embarrassed about reading struggles. Remind them:

- Reading is a skill, not a measure of intelligence
- Everyone improves with practice
- Strong readers use strategies on purpose
- Celebrate small wins

# HIGH SCHOOL READING COMPREHENSION CHECKLIST

## 1. BEFORE READING

- Preview the text (headings, bold words, visuals)
- Identify purpose for reading
- Review 3–5 key vocabulary words
- Build background knowledge (video, map, timeline, discussion)
- Select a graphic organizer that supports the purpose for reading
- Set a reading plan (how much to read, where to stop)

## 2. DURING READING

- Annotate using symbols (✓ ? ! →)
- Pause after each section to check understanding
- Write short margin notes or digital comments
- Use audio support if needed
- Chunk long passages into manageable parts
- Ask questions when confused

## 3. AFTER READING

- Summarize the section in their own words
- Discuss main ideas or arguments
- Identify evidence the author used
- Make connections to life, other texts, or current events
- Complete any assigned organizer or notes

## 4. TARGETED SKILL PRACTICE

- Vocabulary practice (roots, prefixes, suffixes)
- Morphology practice (roots, prefixes, suffixes)
- Fluency practice (read-aloud, echo reading, audio pairing)
- Working memory supports (visuals, step-by-step tasks)
- Quick decoding refreshers if needed

## 5. EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SUPPORT

- Use a reading checklist or task list
- Set a timer for focused intervals
- Show an example of what “finished” looks like
- Set weekly reading goals together
- Build breaks into long assignments

## 6. PROGRESS & REFLECTION

- Use a strategy menu to choose tools independently
- Review a rubric or skill tracker
- Reflect on what helped most this week
- Celebrate small wins (effort, persistence, improvement)

Adapted from the following sources:

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