

# MIRA Reading Comprehension Strategies for Middle School

## Helping Your Student Become a Confident, Independent Reader

By middle school, students are expected to learn from text in a much more independent way. They must keep track of bigger ideas, unfamiliar language, and longer assignments across subjects. For struggling readers, this can lead to confusion and mental fatigue. This handout provides parent-friendly strategies for strengthening understanding and reducing overload.

### What Makes Middle-School Reading Hard?

- Abstract Ideas: demand stronger thinking skills, inference, and explanation
- Content-Specific Reading: science, history, and literature each make different demands<sup>2</sup>
- Longer Assignments: manage longer, multi-step reading and written responses
- Academic Vocabulary: track unfamiliar words and concepts across subjects<sup>2,3,5</sup>
- Background Knowledge Gaps: missing knowledge can make a text feel harder than it is<sup>2,3</sup>
- Many students can engage more successfully with text when it is broken down and supported strategically.

### 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, visuals, charts, maps, and opening/closing paragraphs<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, show a brief video, timeline, or image set<sup>2,3</sup>
- Use a Graphic Organizer (like a K-W-L chart, concept map, section-summary chart, or Cornell notes template) to create a visual roadmap, anchor information, and reduce overwhelm<sup>1,2</sup>

### During Reading: Keep Your Student Engaged

- Use Annotation Symbols (✓ ? ! →):
  - ✓ = important,
  - ? = confusing,
  - ! = surprising,
  - = evidence, cause/effect, or connection
- Chunking Text: Break longer passages into smaller sections; For each chunk ask – What is happening 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 claim..., This connects to earlier information..., I need to reread this..., This is evidence...<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: 1–2 sentence summary per section, Cornell notes, or a short main idea statement
- Discussions: conversation deepens comprehension – Ask: What was the author’s main point? Or What evidence did the author use? Or Why does this idea matter?<sup>2</sup>
- Real-life Connections: help student connect to real life through linking to current events, personal experiences, other books, or other 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, echo read, 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 students 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, and 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

Students often feel embarrassed about reading struggles. Remind them:

- Reading is a skill, not a measure of intelligence
- Everyone improves with practice
- Good readers stop, question, and reread
- Celebrate small wins

# MIDDLE 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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