



MIRA Reading Comprehension Strategies for Upper Elementary

Helping Your Child Become a More Confident, Independent Reader

As students move into upper elementary, reading often becomes more demanding. Texts are longer, vocabulary is less familiar, and students are expected to keep track of more ideas at once. For children with reading difficulties, this can make comprehension feel draining and frustrating. This handout provides clear, useful strategies parents can use at home to reduce overwhelm and strengthen understanding.

What Makes Upper-Elementary Reading Hard?

- Longer Texts: students must hold onto ideas across more pages and sections
- Information-Dense Reading: nonfiction often includes headings, captions, diagrams, and details^{1,2}
- Academic Vocabulary: content words and abstract language can block understanding^{1,3}
- Background Knowledge Gaps: students may not know enough about the topic yet^{2,3}
- Multi-Step Assignments: read, answer, summarize, and explain
- In many cases, the issue is not ability but the need for structure and scaffolding.

Before Reading: Set Your Student Up for Success

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

- Preview the Text: skim headings, subheadings, bolded terms, pictures, captions, charts, and diagrams¹
- Identify Purpose: Ask – why are we reading this? What should we know by the end?
- Pre-teach Key Vocabulary: choose 3–5 words frequently encountered from the text to explicitly teach^{1,3}
- Build Background Knowledge – briefly discuss the topic, use a map, show a brief video, or read a short introductory paragraph^{2,3}
- Use a Graphic Organizer (like a K-W-L chart, concept map, story map, prediction chart, or main idea/details chart) to create a visual roadmap, anchor information, and reduce overwhelm¹

During Reading: Keep Your Student Engaged

- Use Annotation Symbols (✓ ? ! →):
 - ✓ = important,
 - ? = confusing,
 - ! = surprising,
 - = cause/effect or connection
- Chunking Text: Break longer passages into smaller sections; For each chunk ask – What is the main point here? Or How does this connect to what we already read?^{2,4}
- Margin Notes: Encourage short notes in the margins or on sticky notes like – This seems important..., This connects to..., I am confused by..., This supports the main idea...^{1,2}
- Audio Support: Have student listen and follow along while reading aloud with a parent or audio version of the text. This helps with focus, fluency, stamina, and understanding more complex sentences. This is a support, not a shortcut.



After Reading: Strengthen Understanding

- Summaries: 1-2 sentences orally (dictated) or written per paragraph, completed organizer; short main idea statement
- Discussions: conversation deepens comprehension – Ask: What was the main idea? Or What details support it? Or What did the writer want us to learn?²
- Real-life Connections: help student connect to real life through linking to personal experiences, other books, or topics already studied

Targeted Support for Struggling Readers

- Vocabulary Practice: review key words across the week; use a vocabulary journal, semantic map, or word sorts^{1,3}
- Morphology Practice: teach common roots, prefixes, and suffixes; connect related words together^{3,5}
- 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, Mark important parts, Write summary
- Timers: Read for 10–15 minutes, then take a break
- Models of Finished Work: show examples of annotated pages, completed organizers, strong summaries, and vocabulary entries
- 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 stronger summaries, clearer evidence, and better vocabulary use look like
- Strategy Menus: Students can choose from a list and check off which ones they use, building independence
- Weekly reflections: Journal or short conversation

Encouragement Matters

Students in upper elementary often start comparing themselves to others. Remind them:

- Reading is a skill that grows with practice
- Strong readers use strategies on purpose
- Confusion is a signal to stop and think
- Celebrate small wins

UPPER ELEMENTARY 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, short paragraph, 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 sticky note 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 supporting details
- Make connections to life, other texts, or topics
- Complete any assigned organizer or notes

4. TARGETED SKILL PRACTICE

- Vocabulary practice (journals, word sorts, semantic maps)
- 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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