

How Can I Help My Child With Content Area Reading at Home?

—Five Key Strategies to Consider—

Reading in content area subjects, such as social studies, is challenging for many students. To achieve at high levels, students must navigate complex facts and technical words to grasp key ideas. Students also must spend a great deal of time reading a variety of text types, such as textbooks, novels, letters, poetry, and source documents. Further, most teachers expect students to write something in response to reading, citing evidence from the text to demonstrate their understanding.

Here are five ways that parents can help students of all ages develop important text-reading skills.

1. Before reading, preview the text.

What students do before reading a text can enhance their understanding of the content. Previewing the passage gets your child ready to read for two reasons. First, it activates background knowledge so that your child learns new content in connection to what your child already knows about the topic. Previewing also helps your child see how the text is organized and plan how to read it. You and your child can take the following steps to preview text.

- **Walk through the text.** Read aloud the title, headings, and highlighted words. Look at the pictures or graphs. With your child, try to get an idea of what you will learn when you read.
- **Think about background knowledge.** Ask your child “What do you already know about _____?” or “What do you remember about _____?”
- **Read the questions or writing prompt that the teacher provided.** Good readers look ahead at the questions or assignment to better understand how to read the text. Together with your child, discuss what the teacher wants students to learn.
- **Model how good readers preview text and discuss why they do it.** Parents can be reading role models by demonstrating the previewing process and discussing why it is essential. Say, “I will show you how I preview text.” Talk aloud as you preview and explicitly tell your child how previewing and thinking ahead about what you will read helps you learn more.

2. Encourage your child to read at home daily and then discuss or write about key ideas.

The amount of reading your child does in class varies by teacher and subject area. In the upper grades, teachers often expect students to do much of their reading at home. Students who read daily at home and write about what they read are more likely to achieve academic goals. However, reading assignments are often challenging and students can become frustrated without support. Parents should therefore be ready to help read challenging words and unpack key ideas. Use the following steps to support reading at home.

- **Establish a routine.** The reading process will be smoother when you and your child have an established routine with clear expectations. Within your home routine, decide where, when, and how your child will read at home. Keep in mind that no one situation or place works for every child.
- **Be engaged in the reading.** Whether your child reads silently or aloud, pay attention. You may want to read the same passage your child is reading so you can ask questions or talk about a personal connection to the text.
- **Ask questions along the way.** Ask your child to read aloud or silently text that you have selected. After reading, ask a question to check for understanding. Here are some sample questions to ask:
 - “What is the main idea of this section?”
 - “What is this paragraph about?”
 - “What did you learn about _____?”

3. Encourage your child to find evidence in the text to help formulate answers to questions.

Today’s academic standards emphasize citing evidence from the text to back up understanding of what is read. It has been shown that citing evidence leads to a deeper understanding of concepts. When reading with your child, ask your child to find specific ideas in the text to help answer the questions.

Tip: After reading the questions, tell your child to “prove it” by using a highlighter or sticky note to mark places in the text where the evidence is found. Tell your child that this practice will be helpful when looking back at the text to find pieces of information that can be put together to formulate the answer.

4. When reading with your child, discuss key ideas and how they relate to your lives or the world.

Research shows that discussing reading enhances memory of content. To dig deeper into text, your child will have to go beyond simple recall of facts. Use conversation to spark deeper thinking about the text. Rather than quiz your child about the facts, use discussion to encourage thinking more deeply, solving problems, and forming opinions related to your lives or the world. Keep returning to the text to find evidence to support the discussion. The following discussion strategies can enhance learning.

- **Connect ideas within the text to find deeper meaning.** Review the key ideas or facts and then discuss how they relate. Pose a question to discuss together. Your leading question should be about how the ideas in the text connect to form deeper meaning. Here are some sample questions:
 - “What does _____ have to do with _____?”
 - “Why do you think the author included this part about _____?”
 - “Let’s think about the key ideas and try to come up with an overall big idea.”
- **Connect ideas from the text to your life or the world around you.** In your daily routine, talk about how something your child has read relates to what you are currently doing. This practice can occur during family discussions, while watching television, or when you go places. Here’s an example:
In a science book, Alex read about how electricity works. The next day when she was making toast, Alex’s parent asked how the toaster makes heat to toast the bread.

5. If the passage is challenging, break up the text into sections and read them one at a time.

Some reading assignments are more challenging than others. A passage may be long and packed with complex ideas and vocabulary. It is OK to break difficult text into sections, stopping to apply the above strategies section by section. Be sure to go back and tie ideas from one section to another to help your child understand the overall meaning of the text.

