How to Use Questioning to Improve Reading Comprehension

0:00 Owl: Welcome to How to Use Questioning to Improve Reading Comprehension, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.

0:23 Hold on there!

Displayed on screen Student: Huh? What's the problem?

0:28 Owl: That's a good question!

0:30 Before you read that book, let's talk about Questioning.

0:34 Questioning is a skill that readers use before, during, and after they read.

0:40 There are different reasons for asking questions before, during, and after reading.

0:46 For instance, you might ask questions

0:49 to be clear about what you know or want to know,

0:53 to clarify the meaning of what you are reading,

0:56 to speculate about the text,

0:59 to focus on a particular part or idea in the text,

1:03 to locate an answer to a specific question,

1:06 or, to reflect on what you've read.

1:11 Let's talk about some different kinds of questions you should ask yourself before reading.

1:16 Later, we'll talk about asking questions during and after reading, too.

Displayed on screen Student: OK. I'm interested. Tell me more!

1:22 Owl: One important question to ask yourself before reading has to do with your purpose.

1:27 Ask yourself: What is my purpose for reading?

1:30 Your purpose will change how you go about reading the text.

1:35 For instance, if you are preparing for a multiple-choice test, your goal might be to identify important facts to memorize.

1:44 However, if you are writing a research paper, your goal might be to highlight important sections to quote or paraphrase.

1:53 On the other hand, if you are preparing for a discussion, your goal might be to make a note of important thoughts and questions that come up as you read.
Being aware of your purpose for reading will help you to make the best use of your time and effort.

Next, ask yourself: What do I predict the text will be about?

This helps you identify your expectations and preconceptions about the text.

Some other questions to ask yourself before reading have to do with your attitude toward the topic.

For instance, ask yourself...

How do I feel about the topic?

What biases might I have about the topic because of my feelings towards it?

Think about a time when your pre-conception about something turned out not to be accurate.

Before reading, you should also ask yourself what you know about the topic.

What do I already know or think I know about the topic?

What do I need to know about the topic?

What do I want to know about the topic?

and

What do I predict the text will tell me about the topic?

If you've already previewed the text, you should also ask yourself the following questions about it in order to prepare yourself to read it:

What do the title or section headings reveal about the text's topic or argument?

What sections seem familiar?

What sections seem difficult or unfamiliar?

Does the text contain any special features that highlight important ideas, such as bold-faced terms, or visual aids?

Does the text include a summary, abstract, outline, or list of objectives that can help you identify and remember key ideas?

Does the text provide discussion questions to help you focus your attention as you read?

Finally, you should also use what you learned from previewing the text to write guide questions in the margins.

Guide questions help you improve your reading comprehension by focusing your attention on the most important information you need to gather.

For instance, if a chapter title is called "Ten Principles of Effective Leadership," you might write down the following question in the margin:

"What are the ten principles of effective leadership?"

Then, when you go on to read the chapter, try to answer the question by identifying each of the ten principles.
Questioning is also something you do while you read.

By asking questions about what you are reading as you read, you can monitor your comprehension of the text and clarify meaning.

If it turns out you didn't understand something, you can go back and read it again with your questions in mind.

You can construct your questions using one of these six basic question types: who, what, when, where, why, or how.

For instance, you might ask:

What does the author mean by ______?

or

How does this relate to ______?

Why is this ______?

Making statements such as

I don't understand ______?

or

I was confused by ______.

can also help you to monitor your comprehension and clarify meaning.

You can jot down your questions and statements in the margins and come back to them later.

I'll cover more about questioning while you read in the video on Annotating.

Finally, questioning is also something you do after reading.

The point of questioning after you read is to reflect upon and evaluate what you've read.

Ask yourself:

What did I learn?

Is there anything that was unclear?

If so, write down some guide questions and go back and reread difficult passages with these questions in mind.

Did I find what I needed?

If not, what else do I need to know?

Did I find the author's style persuasive?

Why or why not?

Do I agree with what I read?

Why or why not?

How does what I read compare to other things I've read on this topic?

What ideas stuck with me?
6:31 Which ones do I want to investigate more?

6:35 We'll cover more about evaluating a text in videos on Analyzing and Synthesizing what you've read.

**Displayed on screen** Student: Wow, I can really see how questioning before, during, and after reading can help me become a stronger reader. Thank you!

6:47 Owl: You're welcome!

6:50 Thanks for listening to this instructional video on How to Use Questioning to Improve Reading Comprehension!

6:57 Visit the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for more support with reading and writing skills.