Title
Improving Reading Comprehension (Grades 4-8)
Formerly titled "Teaching Narrative and Expository Comprehension"

Target Audience
This course is intended for pre-service and in-service teachers of grades 4-8.

Prerequisites
To successfully participate and complete the assignments in this course, the learner must:
• Have access to a classroom or a few students in grades 4-8 to try out the strategies and the lesson plans.
• Be familiar with taking an online course or have completed the PBS "Practice Learning Online with TeacherLine" course.
• Have some experience in grades 4-8 classrooms.
• Have an interest in language, literacy, and comprehension instruction.

Course Description
This course provides learners with an array of practical strategies for supporting students’ comprehension of narrative and expository texts. Learners will strengthen their knowledge of the factors that affect a student’s comprehension and strategies to improve comprehension: the impact of direct instruction, and active reading strategies. Learners will discover strategies for supporting the comprehension of students who have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and students attending low income schools. Learners will also study the advantages afforded by collaborative learning activities, both face-to-face activities and technology-facilitated activities. As part of the course experience, learners will apply theory to practice by working with students in grades 4-8. By the end of the course, learners will be able to develop lesson plans that use a collaborative approach to teaching comprehension, develop lesson plans for direct instruction of a comprehension skill, and design a professional development presentation that focuses on teaching standards-based comprehension. Learners will begin to explore critical issues in comprehension, read national and state standards related to comprehension in grades 4-8, and analyze their own practices in relation to those standards.

Instructor/Facilitator
See instructor/facilitator sheet

Credits
To be determined by college or university

Goals
The overall goal for this course is for teachers to develop an understanding of important research about text comprehension in grades 4-8 and to learn an array of practical strategies for supporting students' comprehension.
At the end of this course, the learner will understand and be able to apply the following in his or her own classroom:

- The instructional implications of the factors affecting students' comprehension in grades 4-8.
- Active comprehension strategies used by good readers and a range of practical, effective techniques for teaching them.
- Collaborative learning techniques that support students' comprehension.
- Strategies for supporting the comprehension of students who have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and students attending low-income schools.
- A variety of ways to assess students' comprehension.
- How to participate in or start an Internet-based collaborative reading project.

**Learner Outcomes (performance based)**

Learners completing Improving Reading Comprehension (grades 4-8) will be able to:

- Align their state's standards to the NCTE/IRA and their state's standards/CCSS, and list any instructional strategies they have used to meet each of the standards.
- Develop a lesson plan for direct instruction of a comprehension skill.
- Design a reading guide based on current research in the course readings.
- Develop a lesson plan that uses a collaborative approach to teaching a comprehension skill or strategy.
- Create a think-aloud for a diverse student, administer it, and analyze the experience.
- Design and complete a presentation about reading comprehension in grades 4-8 for colleagues.

**Outline of Content and Assignments**

After previewing the documents in the Course Information area, learners will proceed to the Course Content area to complete the following six sessions, working through each session in order. Throughout the sessions, learners are asked to articulate their ideas in various forms: they are encouraged to reflect on their ideas and experiences in their online journal; the weekly discussions in the discussion forum are designed to allow learners to glean information from other learners' experiences. As a final project, learners will design and complete an outline intended for a presentation to the IRA about reading comprehension in grades 4-8. This presentation should focus on one particular aspect of the course material, contain at least one plan for an activity in which your audience participates, and include handouts for the presentation's participants. Students are expected to post their outlines on the discussion board, receive feedback from peers, revise the presentation according to the feedback, and write a reflection paper on the presentation's development.

This course is designed to address the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for the English Language Arts that were developed to serve as a guide for teachers in developing curriculum and instruction that foster students' literacy development. The course specifically addresses Standards 1, 2, and 3. In Session 1 of this course, learners will read the applicable NCTE/IRA standards. Learners will also study how their own state's standards address text comprehension.

The topics and methods presented reflect:

- The Standards for the English Language Arts jointly published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996). Standards were reaffirmed by NCTE (2012) and continue to be distributed by both NCTE and IRA.
The English Language Arts/Literacy Standards of the Common Core State Standards developed through the collaborative efforts of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010).

Standards for Reading Professionals: A Reference for the Preparation of Educators in the United States published by the International Reading Association (2010).

Additionally, this course addresses several of the ISTE NETS*T for teachers, including:
- Use of technology to assess student learning.
- Use of technology resources to engage in ongoing professional development and lifelong learning.
- Use of technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, parents, and the larger community in order to nurture student learning.

Session 1: Key Theoretical Concepts in Text Comprehension

By the end of this session, learners will be able to:

- Define your professional goals and expectations for this course in your online journal.
- Explain your prior knowledge and experiences about teaching narrative and expository comprehension in your online journal.
- Reflect on the theoretical models of the reading process presented in the articles "Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension" and "Reading Comprehension: What Every Teacher Needs to Know" and select the model that best represents your approach to teaching comprehension.
- Evaluate your own instructional practices with respect to NCTE/IRA standards and your state's standards/CCSS by completing a graphic organizer.

Read
- "Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension" from What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction (4th ed.)
- "Reading Comprehension: What Every Teacher Needs to Know" from The Reading Teacher, Vol. 65. Issue 7, April 2012
- NCTE/IRA Standards 1, 2, and 3
- Standards related to text comprehension (grades 4-8) from the learner’s own state.

Write in online journal
- Reflect on professional goals and expectations for the course; also think about how this learning experience might shape future instruction.
- Explain prior knowledge and experiences about teaching text comprehension to students and any techniques that were used.
- Reflect on the similarities and/or differences in the approaches suggested by the authors of the first two readings.

Participate in an online discussion
- Introduce themselves to other learners.
- Reflect on the role that teachers play in the development of student’s comprehension.

Complete activities and assignments
Session 2: Teaching Active Comprehension Strategies

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- List three strategies that good readers use to facilitate their comprehension and explain how teachers will recognize which strategies students are using.
- Explain the importance of techniques for direct instruction of comprehension strategies.
- Explain the importance of metacognition in learning to read.
- Synthesize learning about direct instruction and strategic reading by designing a lesson plan.

Read


Write in online journal

Reflect on the following questions:

- Do you agree with the emphasis the authors of “Reading: What Else Matters Besides Strategies and Skills” place on factors such as motivation and engagement, self-efficacy, epistemic belief, and metacognition? Explain your stance on this topic.
- Evaluate the “Making Inferences” video of direct instruction of a reading comprehension strategy. How does the teacher use direct instruction to increase his understanding of inferencing during this guided reading lesson? Provide specific examples and evaluate their effectiveness.

Participate in an online discussion

- Respond to the research of Durkin and discuss the following question:
  - What is the importance of direct instruction in comprehension strategies for students in grades 4-8?

Complete activities and assignments

- View “Making Inferences” videos 1 and 2.
- Develop a Lesson Plan for Direct Instruction.
- Take the Self-Assessment quiz.

Session 3: Teaching Students to Comprehend Informational and Complex Text

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Design, implement, and analyze the effectiveness of a reading guide or a text map for facilitating students’ comprehension of expository texts.
- Describe and discuss how “road maps” may help students read expository texts.
- Reflect and evaluate the utility of multi-genre texts.
Read

• "Young Children’s Limited and Narrow Exposure to Informational Text" from The Reading Teacher
• "Adolescent Literacy: Learning and Understanding Content" from Future of Children
• Excerpt from Content Reading and Literacy
• "Close Reading in Elementary Schools” from The Reading Teacher
• “Vocabulary Instruction for the Struggling Reader” from Theory into Practice
• Introducing a Text Before Reading from Colorín Colorado
• Reading Comprehension Strategies for Content

Learning from Colorín Colorado Write in online journal

• Think about ways in which you might use close reading in your classroom. What are the benefits and challenges of engaging students in close readings? How would you adapt close readings for your culturally and linguistically diverse learners?

Participate in an online discussion

• Why do you think some students experience comprehension difficulty at or around the fourth-grade level? Discuss some of the specific factors that may be related to students’ comprehension difficulties as they move from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”
• How does a text structure (organizational) reading guide help students comprehend informational text? What are the characteristics of a text structure reading guide that make it successful?

Complete activities and assignments

• Begin the Reading Guide assignment as outlined in “Content Reading Literacy.”
• Explore the Text Structures interactive.
• Take the Self-Assessment quiz.

Session 4: Supporting Diverse Students

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

• Explain previous use of collaborative approaches to comprehension instruction by reflecting and writing about observations in the online journal.
• Analyze the potential obstacles to using collaborative approaches through online discussion.
• Describe how you would use the collaborative approaches to comprehension instruction and explain the challenges involved when implementing them in your classroom in your online journal.
• Analyze students participating in a literature circle by describing student discussion in the online journal.
• Search for and review a collaborative activity that uses the Internet as a tool for communication.

Read

• "Socio-Constructivist and Political Views on Teachers’ Implementation of Two Types of Reading Comprehension Approaches in Low Income Schools” from Theory into Practice
• “Using the Experience-Text Relationship Method with Minority Children,” from the book, Literacy Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students
• “Breaking Down Words to Build Meaning: Morphology, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension in the Urban Classroom” from The Reading Teacher
• “Using Think-Alouds to Assess Comprehension,” from The Reading Teacher
Write in online journal
- Reflect on the principles of effective instruction on the two types of reading comprehension approaches resulting in reading comprehension advances.
- Reflect on the Reading: to Learn video. If you have had prior experience working with linguistically and/or culturally diverse students or if you have worked with urban learners, you may draw on this experience as you complete this reflection.
- Discuss how cultural differences in general can affect text comprehension, based on the information from the articles in this session and evaluate the effectiveness of the Language Experience Approach for culturally diverse students.

Participate in an online discussion
- Respond to and discuss: What challenges do you think you might face in both assessing and building the comprehension of any or all of the three groups of diverse students on which we focus?

Complete activity and assignment
- Begin the Think Alouds to Assess Comprehension Assignment.
- View web cast: Reading to Learn: ELLs in Grades 4-8.
- Take the Self-Assessment quiz.

Session 5: Collaborative Approaches to Comprehension Instruction
By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:
- Explain previous use of collaborative approaches to comprehension instruction by reflecting and writing about observations in your online journal.
- Analyze the potential obstacles to using collaborative approaches through online discussion.
- Describe how to use the collaborative approaches to comprehension instruction and explain the challenges involved when implementing them in the classroom in your online journal.
- Analyze students participating in a literature circle by describing student discussion.
- Search for and review a collaborative activity that uses the Internet as a tool for communication.

Read
- "Collaborative Approaches to Comprehension Instruction, Part 1," from the book, Rethinking Reading Comprehension
- "Collaborative Approaches to Comprehension Instruction, Part 2," from the book, Rethinking Reading Comprehension
- "What's the next Big Thing with Literature Circles? " from Voices from the Middle
- Selection from Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom
- "Teacher's Guide to International Collaboration on the Internet"

Write in online journal
- Reflect upon a time when you asked students to collaborate. What were the successes of this activity and what would have made it more successful?
- Think about the strategies discussed in the readings concerning collaborative approaches. What might be the challenges to using these methods? What might work in your own classroom?
- Analyze the videos of literature circles, paying particular attention to how collaborative efforts help to make meaning.

Participate in an online discussion
• Respond to the question:
What difficulties have you encountered or could you imagine encountering in using collaborative techniques to improve students’ comprehension of narrative and expository text, and how have you overcome them or imagine overcoming them?

Complete activities and assignments
- View the “Growing Talk, Literature Circles” (Part 1), and “Literature Circles” (Part 2) videos.
- Explore the suggested Web sites for telecollaborative projects.
- Design a lesson plan based on collaborative approaches.
- Take the Self-Assessment quiz.

Session 6: Concluding Thoughts and Ideas

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:
- Assess learning in this course by comparing prior knowledge and acquired knowledge in the online journal.
- Analyze the learning experience in this course by reflecting on professional goals and expectations in the online journal.
- Synthesize learning about text comprehension by developing a conference presentation plan and writing a reflection paper.

Complete assignment
- Complete the Think-Aloud to Assess Comprehension Assignment
- Complete the Final Project: Conference presentation plan, handouts, peer review and reflection paper

Write in online journal
- Reflect on professional goals and expectations
- Reflect on acquired knowledge

Schedule

This course is scheduled to take approximately 45 hours to complete. The number of hours identified for each course reflects time spent online, but does not reflect the total time spent completing offline coursework and assignments. All learners are different and learners will likely spend double the indicated number of hours completing all coursework depending on learning styles and work habits.

Requirements

Learners are expected to:
- Complete all assignments.
- Maintain an online journal.
- Participate and actively engage in discussions with fellow learners while contributing to the social construction of knowledge.
- Be self-directed and self-motivated.
- Ask for assistance when they need it.

Materials (hardware, software, plug-ins)

Technical Requirements
- Word processor
- Internet service provider
• E-mail

**Academic Dishonesty Policy**

To be inserted by university institution only

**Evaluation**

This course is evaluated on a letter grade basis, and may be available for graduate credit. See graduate credit details pertaining to specific graduate credit institutions.