

## ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE: THE IMPACT OF PRE-READING TASKS ON READING PROFICIENCY

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### *Annotation*

This article explores the critical role of pre-reading activities in fostering effective reading comprehension within language education. Challenging the notion that reading is a passive decoding process, the author argues that successful comprehension is a dynamic and strategic endeavor that begins before engagement with the text. Drawing on foundational theories and empirical research, the article outlines five key functions of pre-reading strategies: activating prior knowledge, fostering anticipation and intrinsic motivation, pre-teaching vocabulary and conceptual frameworks, establishing reading purposes, and developing metacognitive awareness. Through detailed examples and scholarly references, the author emphasizes that pre-reading tasks are not ancillary, but essential tools for enhancing reader engagement, comprehension, and long-term literacy development. The article concludes by advocating for the deliberate and consistent integration of pre-reading strategies in reading instruction to cultivate more strategic, confident, and independent readers.

**Key words:** *Pre-reading activities; reading comprehension; prior knowledge activation; metacognitive strategies; vocabulary instruction; reading pedagogy; intrinsic motivation; ESL reading strategies; cognitive scaffolding; purposeful reading*

In the intricate tapestry of language education, reading is often perceived as the solitary act of decoding symbols and extracting meaning from text. However, a nuanced understanding of effective reading pedagogy reveals that successful comprehension is rarely an isolated event. Instead, it is the culmination of various strategic preparations, foremost among them being the implementation of pre-reading activities [1]. These preparatory steps, executed before learners engage with the main text, are not mere time fillers but rather essential conduits that bridge prior knowledge with new information, ignite curiosity, and fundamentally enhance the reading experience. For educators aiming to cultivate proficient and engaged readers, integrating robust pre-reading strategies is not merely beneficial—it is indispensable.

One of the most profound contributions of pre-reading activities lies in their capacity to activate prior knowledge. Readers are not passive recipients of information; they bring a rich tapestry of experiences, beliefs, linguistic knowledge, and understanding of the world to every text they encounter [2]. Neglecting this existing cognitive framework is akin to asking students to build a house without a foundation. Pre-reading techniques such as brainstorming, using KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) charts, or concept mapping explicitly prompt students to recall relevant information. For instance, before reading about climate change, students might list what they already know about the environment or extreme weather. This process makes the incoming information more relatable and creates ready-made cognitive "hooks" for new concepts to attach to, thereby deepening comprehension and retention. It helps learners connect the known to the unknown, making complex ideas more accessible and less intimidating [3]. This engagement with existing schemata is crucial for constructing meaning, particularly in academic or specialized texts where background knowledge can significantly impact understanding.

Beyond cognitive activation, pre-reading activities are potent tools for building anticipation and fostering intrinsic motivation. Imagine being presented with a dense, unfamiliar academic article without any context or forewarning. Such an encounter can feel overwhelming and quickly extinguish any nascent interest. Conversely, a brief introductory discussion, a provocative question related to the topic, a quick scan of headings and visuals, or a short video clip can transform a potentially daunting task into an intriguing challenge [4]. By piquing curiosity and providing a glimpse into the text's content and structure, these activities transform passive readers into active, eager learners. When students feel a sense of purpose or have their curiosity stimulated before reading, they are more likely to invest cognitive effort, persist through challenging passages, and actively seek answers to their pre-reading questions, leading to a more engaged and ultimately more successful reading process. This proactive engagement shifts the dynamic from 'having to read' to 'wanting to read,' a critical shift for long-term reading success.

Another critical function of pre-reading activities is the proactive pre-teaching of challenging vocabulary and complex concepts. Texts, especially those encountered in academic disciplines or specialised fields, often contain unfamiliar lexicon, idiomatic expressions, or intricate ideas that can serve as significant impediments to comprehension [5]. Encountering a barrage of unknown words can quickly lead to frustration, disengagement, and a breakdown in understanding the overall message. Addressing these potential semantic and conceptual roadblocks before reading allows

students to encounter them with a degree of familiarity. Strategies such as vocabulary previews, semantic mapping, or even mini-lessons on key concepts ensure that students possess the foundational linguistic and conceptual tools necessary to navigate the text successfully. This deliberate front-loading reduces cognitive load during the actual reading process, enabling learners to focus their mental energy on synthesizing meaning and understanding arguments rather than being bogged down by individual word recognition or definitional struggles. This is particularly vital for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and struggling readers, for whom vocabulary often represents a major barrier to fluency and comprehension.

Reading without a clear objective can often feel aimless and unproductive. Pre-reading activities are indispensable for setting a clear purpose for reading, thereby directing students' attention and guiding their interaction with the text [6]. Activities such as asking students to predict what the text will be about, formulating specific questions they hope the text will answer, or identifying particular information they need to extract, provide a concrete roadmap. This purposeful reading encourages active engagement, transforming the act of reading into a targeted search for meaning. When students know why they are reading (e.g., to find specific details, to understand a new concept, to evaluate an argument, to compare different perspectives), they are more likely to employ appropriate reading strategies, monitor their comprehension effectively, and ultimately achieve their reading goals. This intentionality shifts reading from a passive intake of words to an active, problem-solving endeavour.

Finally, pre-reading activities are foundational in fostering the development of metacognitive skills—the ability to think about one's own thinking and learning processes [7]. By engaging in pre-reading tasks, students are implicitly encouraged to activate their existing knowledge, predict content, identify challenges, and formulate strategies for comprehension. This process cultivates an awareness of their reading process: "What do I already know about this topic?", "What do I expect to learn?", "What might be difficult here?", "How should I approach this text?" This self-awareness is a cornerstone of becoming a strategic, independent, and flexible reader. As students learn to monitor their understanding, make predictions, and adapt their reading approach based on the text's demands and their own goals, they develop a sense of agency and control over their learning. These are transferable skills that extend far beyond the reading classroom, empowering learners across all academic disciplines.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, pre-reading activities transcend mere pedagogical conveniences; they are integral components of effective reading instruction. By systematically

activating prior knowledge, building anticipation and motivation, pre-teaching crucial vocabulary and concepts, establishing a clear purpose for reading, and nurturing vital metacognitive skills, these preliminary steps construct a robust framework for profound comprehension and sustained engagement [8]. For educators, the deliberate integration of pre-reading strategies is not just good practice but a fundamental commitment to empowering students to become confident, strategic, and lifelong readers who can navigate the complexities of diverse texts with proficiency and critical insight. Investing time in these pre-reading preparations is an investment in future literacy success.

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