



Learn at Home

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Reading Strategy: Determining Importance

You have probably seen this before in your child's homework: they have an article or chapter to read in a textbook and they have highlighted nearly everything! If this is the case, your young reader may not understand how to determine what is important in a piece of writing.

One of the most important skills to learning how to determine importance is paying attention.

Here are a few strategies your child can use to help them figure out what is important in a piece of writing. These come in most handy when working with non-fiction writing or textbooks. Some of these strategies are similar strategies to how good readers approach *any* piece of writing.

Pay Attention—if your child's teacher talked about the book, passage, or even the topic in class, have your child think about it for a moment. What did the teacher say about the writing? *How* did they talk about it? Was there something in particular the teacher focused on? For example, if the assignment is about women's suffrage and the teacher spent a lot of time in class discussing how the women were treated in jail, then your child can pay attention whenever jail is mentioned in the reading.

Prepare—if your child's homework assignment is to read a passage or article and then answer questions based on that passage, one of the best things they can do is to **read the questions before they read the passage. This primes their brain to look for the answers while they read.** If they know the questions, then their brain will alert them when the answers to those questions show up in the reading. Sometimes, the young reader will even say, "That's the answer to that question!" It's like being sent on a treasure hunt when they know what clues to look for. It's exciting to find the clues. It gives the young reader confidence when they easily recognize the answer to one of the questions.

Predict—another strategy your child can use is to look at the cover of the book or, if it is an article, any images that might go with it. For example, if your child picks up a book called *Animal Architects* with a picture of a beaver with a piece of wood on the cover, they might predict that animal dwellings will be an important part of the book. They can *predict* what kinds of important information will be presented to them. Your child might say, "I think this book will be about the different kinds of houses animals build" or "I think I'll learn about how animals build their houses."

Ask Questions—after preparing, have your child **ask questions about what they think will be important in the reading**. Chances are, if the questions are based on what is important to them, it might be important to the author as well. For example, your child might ask, “I wonder how animals build their houses?” Chances are, this is exactly what the author asked before writing the book.

Look for Formatting Clues—this is the basic layout of the article or the chapter in the textbook. Have your child **pay attention to headings and sub-headings**. Those headings are usually indications of what will be highlighted in the coming text. For example, in a book about *Elephants*, a heading titled, “Baby Steps” is a clue that the most important aspect of this section is information about baby elephants.

Other formatting clues are side boxes. Textbooks and articles often have boxes on the side with some of the most important information highlighted within them.

- ♦ **Keep in mind that many kids skip headings and titles and go straight to the text. *When reading to determine importance, it is critical they read the headings and any subheadings.*** Kids also tend to skip side boxes, so make sure they look at the boxes to see if there is any important information contained within them.

Charts, pictures, illustrations, graphs or any other visuals also house important information. Be sure to have your child look at those.

Finally, have them **pay attention to what is within the text**. Any numbers, proper names, places and dates are usually important. If a word or phrase is capitalized, bolded, italicized, or highlighted in any way means that element of the text is important.

These might seem like a lot of steps! But think about the last time you read an article—you most likely went through some of these strategies without even thinking about it. With practice, your young reader can do the same.