

Comprehending texts

TEN TIPS FOR READERS

- 1 Remember, **making meaning starts with you** — with what you already know, feel and believe about the topic.
- 2 Know **WHY** you are reading (or viewing) a text.
- 3 Consider what the **author has set out to do** — are they trying to entertain you, persuade you, instruct you or give you information?
- 4 Give reading (or viewing) your **full attention**. It is important to become engaged and stay engaged with what the author is saying and where the author is leading your thinking. Remember, you are the one who must make meaning from the text!
- 5 **Pause often** during reading and reflect on the characters, the actions, the information, the illustrations or even just the beauty of the language.
- 6 If you lose track of the meaning, go back and pick up the threads.
- 7 **Read, watch and listen!** Build your vocabulary and understanding of words and everyday expressions. The more you know, the easier it will be to make meaning from text.
- 8 Make your dictionary your best friend. Use it often to find the meanings of words. Add these words to your own vocabulary.
- 9 **Read anything and everything!** This is the best way to understand how texts work, and how authors use language and images to achieve their purpose.
- 10 You will know that you have understood a text if you are able to tell someone else about it.

READING 'LIKE A WRITER'

Writers:

- set down their ideas in a certain way (structure)
- link their ideas together in particular ways (cohesive ties).

TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURE

When we use **language**, we use different patterns of thinking to organise our ideas. These patterns, which occur over and over in text, are called **top-level structures**.

The most common patterns are:

- **cause and effect** — to explain what happened and why
- **compare and contrast** — to show how things are the same, or how they are different
- **problem and solution** — a problem and how it is (or might be) solved
- **listing** — a simple list or a lot of points about the same thing.

These patterns are clearly seen in graphic representations. (See Comprehending visual texts pp. 10–14, 53–55, 86, 87)

Cause and effect

Things happen for a reason. Every cause results in an effect — one thing leads to the other.

Example:

Because it rained, [CAUSE] the match was cancelled. [EFFECT]
As a consequence of the cancellation, [CAUSE] the grand final had to be delayed. [EFFECT]

When we read, we need to think 'like a writer'.

To comprehend a text, readers need to understand:

1. how a text is constructed
2. how ideas are connected.



Here are some words and phrases that signal **cause and effect** relationships.

so, so that	because	as a result	consequently
due to	caused by	for this reason	therefore
thus	if	resulted in	an outcome of

Circle the **cause** and underline the **effect** in each sentence.

1. A grasshopper has strong back legs so it can leap long distances.
2. Many homes have been destroyed as a result of the recent bushfires.
3. The big drop in elephant numbers is largely due to the poaching of ivory.
4. If sand is heated to a very high temperature it will melt into glass.
5. When the earthquake struck, hundreds of homes crumbled to the ground.



Compare and contrast

When we **compare** ideas, we think about how they are the **same**.

When we **contrast** ideas, we think about how they are **different**.

Example:

The emu is the largest Australian bird and stands about two metres tall. It has a long, thin neck like the African ostrich, [COMPARING] but it is neither as big nor as heavy. [CONTRASTING] Like all birds, emus and ostriches have feathers, two legs and two wings, [COMPARING] but, unlike most birds, they cannot fly. [CONTRASTING]

Here are some words and phrases that signal **comparing and contrasting**.

Comparing		Contrasting	
like, likewise	compared with	however	unlike
similarly	in the same way	yet	but
also	both	on the other hand	whereas
just as	again	although	besides

Do the ideas in each sentence **compare** or **contrast** with each other?

1. A gum tree is an evergreen tree, whereas a jacaranda is deciduous.
2. Like all reptiles, a snake is cold-blooded and lays eggs.
3. Owls eat mice, frogs and lizards; but parrots eat seeds, nuts and plants.
4. Both oranges and lemons are used in the making of marmalade jam.
5. Unlike gold, copper will tarnish and turn green with age.



Writers can compare things by using adjectives, antonyms and their choice of vocabulary.

Examples:

- Paul is taller than Ben.
- The king had great power and wealth, while his people lived in hunger and poverty.
- He bore a remarkable resemblance to the prince. Were they brothers?



Problem and solution

For every **problem**, there is a real or possible **solution**.

Scientists pose problems and seek to find solutions through research and experimentation. Storywriters create problems for their characters to solve.

Examples:

Scientific

A cochlear implant is a long-term solution for people with moderate to profound hearing loss.

Story

Cinderella had nothing to wear to the ball, until her fairy godmother showed up. With a wave of her magic wand, Cinderella's fairy godmother changed Cinderella's rags into a beautiful gown. So Cinderella went off to the ball where she would meet a handsome prince.



Here are some words and phrases that signal a **problem and solution** structure.

need to prevent	problem	solution
question	answer	difficulties
outcome	in response to	as a result

Listing

Listing is a very common way of organising information. Some lists describe, some lists explain, some lists direct and some lists argue.

Lists can be vertical or horizontal, and are organised in:

- a logical way — where the more obvious or important things are described first (recipes, descriptions and explanations)
- a chronological way — where events are listed in a time sequence (stories and recounts)
- simple lists — such as shopping lists or as words separated by commas. For example: *There are many kinds of pasta, including spaghetti, macaroni, fettuccine, vermicelli, tagliatelle and gnocchi.*

Here are some words and phrases that signal **listing**:

for example	also	types, kinds
such as	first, next	later
some features	for instance	to begin with
some characteristics	many parts	as time passed

Consecutive numbering (1, 2, 3, 4 ...) or bullet (dot) points also signal a list.

COHESION

Cohesion is the way the text sticks together. Each sentence connects to the next and the ideas are linked together in a meaningful way. When a text is cohesive, the reader is able to follow the flow of meaning without difficulty.

Cohesive devices are used to tie ideas together.

COHESIVE TIES (CONNECTING IDEAS)

Cohesive ties are words or phrases used to link ideas together. These ideas are connected through the **grammar** and **vocabulary** of the text. Cohesive ties make reading flow naturally, which helps us to make sense of the whole text. We can only understand a text if it is first **coherent** (connected in a logical way).

COHESIVE TIES

