**ACTIVATING THE SCHEMATA**

Prereading Strategies for Better Reading Comprehension

# Description

Reading is not reading unless comprehension of the print takes place. Upon beginning an assignment containing significant reading, many students will just start with the first line and read without a plan or reason for reading until they come to a stopping point somewhere along the way. Often, they will have little or no idea what they just read and will likely eventually read the whole passage again a second or even a third time.

The schema refers to prior learning, and it is this prior learning that may lend a context for newer learning and, hence, give the newer learning meaning and importance. Comprehension is enhanced in the process. The more connections made with prior learning, the more likely students will be actively engaged with the new reading. Listed below are several strategies teachers can implement to prepare students for active rather than passive reading.

# Pre-Reading Strategies for Better Reading Comprehension

The following list contains various suggestions for activating the students’ schemata prior to a major reading assignment. All may be modified to fit the specific requirements, grade levels, or course designs of assignments.

Guided Anticipation

A series of provocative questions related to the new topic is one way to involve students in a new concept. To avoid the “monkey-see, monkey-do” or copy-cat tendencies of many students, it would be advantageous to let the students write down their responses and then discuss the responses as a group later. For example, if the topic for a political science course centers on elected representatives, the teacher may want to expand the discussion to term limits for elective offices. The students already have a basic understanding of election processes, and the connection to the topic of term limits is built on this basic knowledge. Eliciting students’ responses before introducing the topic prepares them for conceptual learning. See Activity A for an example of such a pre-reading exercise on term limits.

## Cloze

A cloze exercise is often highly effective for ESL students as well as native English speakers when making connections of previously learned vocabulary or terms with new content in reading. The student is actively involved with the content of the pre-reading exercise while attempting to create meaning of the print. Key words are missing, and the reader must supply words drawing on previous knowledge. Oftentimes, it may be helpful for two or three students to collaborate on the exercise, especially if there is an ESL student who may be more reticent to take a risk with vocabulary. Activity B is an example of a cloze in preparation for a continued study of the Bill of Rights in a political science or history class. The student may not find the exact word from the original document, but one close in meaning can be acceptable for purposes of this activity.

**Modification**: One modification of the cloze is to let students devise their own cloze activities to be shared with other students. Of course, the student would need to provide correct answers and “teach” those who complete the cloze.

## Writing in the Round

This activity for activating the schema requires at least six or seven students to be effective. Writing in the Round may be effective as a pre-reading and/or pre-discussion activity because it not only allows participating students to think about their own views, but they must also consider and respond to the views of others.

The teacher will give the groups of students a starter phrase that relates to the topic to be discussed. There should be no discussion of the new topic prior to this assignment. To begin, each student in the group will read the phrase and add to it. Students will continue writing until the teacher calls “switch”, at which time, the students will pass their papers to the next student in their groups. After receiving a classmate’s paper, each student will need to read the previous student’s composition and add to it, keeping a sense of fluidity in the additional thoughts. This will continue until the papers end up in the original author’s hands, at which time, that student will write a closing statement to complete the paper. The time limits called by the teacher may start out at about one-and-one-half minutes, but they should gradually lengthen in order to allow time for the students to read the previous offerings before adding their own thoughts.

This activity is effective in a civics class, a political science class, a history class, or a class on critical reading. Examples of possible starter lines might include:

When I read the front page of a newspaper, I ... *[begin writing thoughts here]*.

When I listen to the TV news, I should ... *[begin writing thoughts here]*.

To me, political campaign speeches are ... *[begin writing thoughts here]*.

I need to know what is going on in the government because ... *[begin writing thoughts here]*.

Of course, this activity is adaptable to several various applications and grade levels, so the teacher is certainly not limited in its use.

## Free writing

This activity requires that the students draw on their memory banks of information from previous lessons. The teacher will supply a key word or short phrase that is closely related to a previous lesson and instruct the student to just write whatever comes to mind. The teacher should take an “anything goes” approach when beginning the free writing, and students are not to be overly concerned with proper grammar, spelling, or any other typically correct writing rules. The idea is to allow the free flow of ideas without limitations. To make the activity more interesting for the students, the teacher may consider participating along with the students by, perhaps, writing thoughts on the board. An appropriate time limit for the activity might be about five minutes.

Upon the completion of the writing phase, the students and the teacher can share their ideas and be open to discussion, if called for.

# ACTIVITY A

Answer the following questions “yes” or “no” and give any added explanations that you think are needed to justify your answers.

1. The citizens of a community or country should be able to choose members in their cities, towns, or states to represent them in government.

Circle: yes no

Explain:

1. If I don’t like what my elected official does in office, he or she should be removed from that office.

Circle: yes no

Explain:

1. As long as my elected official is doing what I think is best, he or she should be able to be re-elected over and over again.

Circle: yes no

Explain:

1. Other states’ federal election laws have no effect on what happens in my state.

Circle: yes no

Explain:

1. The federally elected officials from another state have no effect on what happens to me.

Circle: yes no

Explain:

# ACTIVITY B

## **THE BILL OF RIGHTS:**

## **AMENDMENTS TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION**

[A Cloze Activity]

We will be continuing our study of the Bill of Rights by reviewing those amendments previously discussed. There are missing words, though, that you will need to fill in within the bracketed spaces. Do not look at your text or notes to find the missing words but read the surrounding text to find a word that makes sense. You may not find the exact missing word but think about the purpose of the Bill of Rights to find a word that would complete the meaning.

### Amendment I

Congress shall make no [1. ] respecting an establishment of [2. ], or prohibiting the free [3. ] thereof, or abridging the [4. ] of speech, or of the press, or the

[5. ] of the people to assemble, and to [6. ] the Government for a redress of grievances.

### Amendment II

A well-regulated [7. ], being necessary to the [8. ] of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear [9. ], shall not be infringed.

### Amendment III

No [10. ] shall, in time of peace be quartered in any [11. ], without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of [12. ], but in a manner to be prescribed by law.