



How to Read for Comprehension - Key Words for Answering Questions

Articles: While reading an article, ask yourself the following questions (be aware of the fact that this information will not necessarily be in the first or last paragraphs):

- What does the author want me to learn while reading this article?
 - What is the main problem/issue being discussed?
 - Does the author blame anyone for this problem/issue?
 - Does the author offer any solutions to the problem/issue?
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Before you can interpret information and predict what may happen next, you have to **KNOW** the important facts in an article. These **EXPLANATORY WORDS** will help you.

Knowledge - questions emphasize memory - recall questions. Who, what, when, where, how...

- **define** - give concise, clear, and authoritative meanings. Don't give more than one example to support your definition
- **describe** - Recount, characterize, sketch, or relate in sequence or story form
- **list** - create an itemized series of concise statements
- **explain** - to bring out into the open, to make clear, and to clarify; emphasizes cause/effect relationships or step-by-step sequences
- **illustrate** - to show by means of a picture, diagram, or other graphic aid; uses specific examples to show an idea, concept or principle
- **relate** - to show how two or more things are connected through similarities
- **trace** - to present, in step-by-step sequence, a series of facts which are related in terms of time or cause/effect
- **Summarize** - give the main points or facts in condensed form omitting details and illustrations. Do not introduce new material in a summary (when writing, use in conclusion)

Application - Use of facts, rules, principles

- How is _____ an example of _____?
- How is _____ related to _____?
- Why is _____ significant?



CRITICAL WORDS: These words require you to analyze and evaluate information in order to PROVE your ideas

Evaluation - Development of opinions, judgments, or decisions

- Do you agree _____?
- What do you think about _____?
- What is the most important _____?
- Prioritize _____
- How would you decide about _____?
- What criteria would you use to assess _____?

Evaluate the relative importance of:

- Carefully appraise the problem and identify what is to be judged.
- Determine the criteria for judging.
- Assess what is to be judged based on each criterion.
- Decide which is the most important, the second most important, and the least important of the choices offered, being sure to explain why you have reached the conclusion you did.

Analysis - This requires you to breakdown a communication (article, speech, chart, map, book...) into its parts in order to identify how these parts are related to each other.

Analyze: Divide a complex whole into its component parts and examine these parts to determine how the parts contribute to the whole. Identify the components, examine them, determine relationships among them

- eliminate irrelevant information
- explain how the parts contribute to the whole
- Example

Narration - George Washington was a great American president

Analysis - George Washington's appointment of some of the finest minds in the U.S. to his first cabinet insured his place in history as one of the greatest presidents

Interpret - discover the relationships among facts on the knowledge level and then interpret these facts.

Relate - Show how things are connected with each other, how one causes another, how one correlates with another, or how one is like another.

Cause/Effect - This is mostly used with argumentative/persuasive writing when a writer wants to convince an audience that the cause of action(s) produces desired effect(s). Sometimes one cause results in a number of effects. It is up to the reader to determine whether the cause/effect argument is valid and whether the writer poses adequate elaboration in both categories. Examine whether the author's statement of effects are short term or long term. Effects usually fits under categories such as: political, social, religious, psychological... Often, history validates a writer's argument. Take the example of Ida B. Wells who denounced white Southern racism. You could (and should) use each of the following to explain the cause(s) of the problem as well as the effect(s): political, social, and psychological.

Compare/Contrast - Often you will be asked to compare two passages, documents, or ideologies. The writer of the assessment is asking you to both compare AND contrast. Think of a Venn diagram to map out your ideas and make sure you organize your points carefully. You can either use BLOCK format (citing all the comparative points and then contrasting points) or proceed in a POINT BY POINT format, where you examine ideas one by one for both similar and different ideas. Example - compare/contrast how the KKK viewed African Americans versus how Ida Wells viewed African Americans. Or, compare/contrast how African Americans were viewed by White Americans before the Civil War, and how African Americans are viewed today by White Americans (in general).

HOW YOU USE ALL OF THIS INFORMATION - now that you know the facts, and have analyzed and evaluated this information, you need to apply what you have learned. **WHY** is this material important/relevant?

Predict - Predicting is a very important skill. Examine inductively (moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories) all of the evidence in a thinking problem and then predict an outcome based on the evidence. This line of thinking is often used in webquests and evaluating outcomes of new rulings or laws.

Generalize - Apply what you have read in this particular article to other events. For example, when reading an article about how White people in the South viewed African Americans, formulate a theory on what causes racism - then formulate a theory on how to end racism.

Synthesize - Combination of ideas to form a new whole:

- What would predict/infer from _____
- What ideas can you add to _____
- How would you create/design a new _____
- What might happen if you combine _____ with _____
- What solutions would you suggest for _____

Example: In the Ida Wells article, take the information you learned from this article and predict how countries such as the U.S. today can create policies to end racism and provide equal opportunities for all people. Or, use the information in this article and relate it to specific issues in the U.S. today.

