

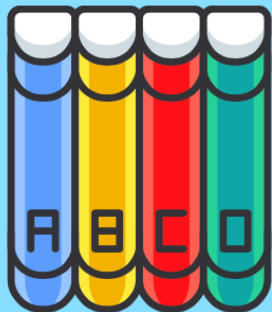


Preventing the "Fourth-Grade Slump": Three Principles for Improving Students' Reading Comprehension

Fluency Is Important

Fluency allows the mind to concentrate on comprehension:

- If decoding does not happen quickly, the **decoded material will be forgotten before it is understood.**
- Students overcome the limitations of working memory by **rapidly grasping what kind of text** this is, **rapidly identifying words**, and by **understanding the grammatical connections between them** at the basic level of the sentence.
- Fluency is increased by domain knowledge, which **allows the reader to make rapid connections between new and previously learned content**; this both eases and deepens comprehension.



Breadth of Vocabulary is Important

Breadth of vocabulary increases comprehension and facilitates further learning:

- In vocabulary acquisition, a small early advantage grows into a much bigger one unless we **intervene very intelligently to help the disadvantaged student learn words at an accelerated rate.**
- A well educated 12th-grader knows an enormous number of words, **mostly learned incidentally.**
- **Most vocabulary growth results incidentally**, from massive immersion in the world of language and knowledge.

Domain Knowledge is Important

Domain knowledge increases fluency, broadens vocabulary, and enables deeper comprehension:

- Domain knowledge **enables readers to make sense of word combinations and choose among multiple possible word meanings.**
- Domain knowledge is **necessary to give meaning to otherwise confusing sentences.**
- Reading (and listening) require the reader to **make inferences that depend on prior knowledge**- not on decontextualized "inferencing" skills.
- Irony, metaphor, and other **literary devices require background knowledge for comprehension.**

