



T U T O R S ' T I P S

Strategies for comprehending non-fiction texts.

Throughout their lives students are expected to read effectively and learn from a variety of non-fiction texts. A student may have the need to read a text-book or a learner's guide to gain a Learner's Licence, or a forklift licence, a First Aid Certificate, or pass a Workplace Health and Safety check.

Students need to develop strategies to help them become accomplished readers of non-fiction texts that provide information and instruction.

The tutor must always keep in mind the different learning styles of students. Ensure that your student is interacting with the text by hearing, seeing and having hands-on experience with the subject matter of the text.

The following steps will assist the tutor in guiding the student to read and comprehend non-fiction texts.



Step 1

Make the student aware of the structure and lay-out of non-fiction texts

(a) Non-fiction texts tend to be denser than other texts (Just the facts)
As information is often close to a summary already, summarising further is especially difficult.

(b) Diagrams, illustration and graphs convey much of the information.
Graphic representations are an important part of information that the text is discussing. Students need to read and analyse them carefully.

(c) Vocabulary is important
Many new terms are introduced and defined. Specialised terminology has to be learned.

(d) Precision is vital

Accuracy is vital in vocabulary, problems and applications. Being close is not good enough; exactness is required.

(e) Style and lay-out of text

Titles, headings, italics and bold print are often used. Bullet points and underlining are often used to indicate important points.



Step 2

Take a tour guide through the text

Glance over the main features of the text:

1. The Title
2. Table of Contents
3. The way in which the text is divided - sections, chapters
4. Index
5. Glossary
6. Headings, the sub headings,
7. Visuals (graphs, diagrams, pictures),

The student could read the first sentence of each paragraph (topic sentence) to get the main gist of the text.

This will allow the tutor and student to overview the subject matter and to get an overall picture of the time line that it may take to read, learn and pass a test associated with the text.

Step 3

Help the student to make the connection

Find out what the student already knows about the subject. A proficient reader will connect what is new in a text to what they already know or have experienced.

Example A

'This give way rule about turning right at intersections reminds me of an accident that I nearly had in the middle of Ipswich.'

Example B

I saw a program on television about a fellow who had his arm caught in a machine and bled to death because no one heard him yelling out. Apparently he had taken the safety guard off the machine.



Step 4

Encourage the student to have a questioning attitude when they are reading.

Have the student stop their reading and ask themselves:

'Did this passage make sense to me?'

'What were the important points in this passage?'

'How is the information in this paragraph linked to the information that I have already read?'

Encourage the student to have a running inner dialogue that issues commands during reading.

'This is pretty tough going so I had better slow down.'

'Hold on there - this does not make sense - I had better re-read.'

'This stuff doesn't look very important - I'll just skim over it and get into the next section'.



Step 5

Help the student to visualise in his/her mind what is being suggested by the words on the page.

- Graphs, diagrams and pictures play an important role in communicating critical ideas to the students.
- The tutor may have to take the student on a 'visual guide' of the text showing the student how to interpret each visual.
- By questioning the student about graphic information in tables and diagrams the student will learn how to interpret these visuals.
- If visuals are not included in the text, find diagrams, pictures or real-life models to support the text.

Step 6

Determining the Importance of information

Students often have problems 'sifting the wheat from the chaff'.

- Determining the importance of facts helps a reader make decisions about what part of a text needs to be known and what parts are just background knowledge.

- Use clues like headings, bold or italics, bullets and underlining.

Creating interactive study guides

Construct the guide to help the student decide where to focus their attention during reading and to support their learning when the material might prove challenging.

Break the text into portions to be:

- Read orally by the student
 - Read by the tutor
 - Read silently by the student
 - Skimmed by the student because they are less important.
- Teach the students to answer questions by scanning the text looking for a key word and then slowing down to read the information around the key word.
 - Turn all main headings and sub-headings into questions to be answered.
 - Leave blank pages at the end of the guide for difficult words that are related to the subject matter.



Note: Highlighting and underlining key points is a skill that may not be necessary in non-fiction texts. As non-fiction texts only present facts, the student may have a tendency to highlight every word.

- Students could use sticky notes to record their own thoughts questions, summaries and mnemonics to help with memorising facts.
- Show students how to take notes in a form that suits the student. Numbers can be used to show importance.



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