

Question-Generation

Description: Students are taught to boost their comprehension of expository passages by (1) locating the main idea or key ideas in the passage and (2) generating questions based on that information.

Reserve at least a full instructional session to introduce this comprehension strategy. (For effective-teaching tips, consult the guidelines presented in *“Introducing Academic Strategies to Students: A Direct-Instruction Approach”*).



Materials:

- Overhead transparencies of practice reading passages, transparency markers
- Student copies of practice reading passages (optional) or reading/text books

Preparation:

- Prepare overheads of sample passages.

Intervention Script:

1. Introduce this strategy to the class:

- A. **Locating Explicit Main Idea:** Tell students that some passages have summary sentences that state the main idea or “gist” of the paragraph or passage. Using examples of passages with explicit main ideas, train students to identify and underline main-idea sentences.
- B. **Finding Key Facts.** In some passages, the main idea is implied rather than explicitly stated. Readers must first identify the key facts or ideas of the passage before they can summarize the passage’s main idea.

Using examples of passages with implied main ideas, locate and circle key facts or ideas. Describe to students how you distinguished this central information from less important details. Have students practice this skill on additional practice passages.

- C. **Writing a “Gist” Sentence.** Show students a passage with an implied main idea. Circle all key ideas or facts. Demonstrate how to write a “gist” sentence (one that is built from the identified key ideas and summarizes the paragraph’s main idea). Emphasize that the reader may have link information from different sections of the passage to build a gist sentence. Have students practice this skill on additional practice passages.
- D. **Generating Questions.** Tell students that careful readers often construct questions about what they are reading to help them learn. Put up a list of ‘signal words’ that can be used as question-starters: e.g., who, what, where,

when, why, how. Using sample passages, show students how to convert explicit main-idea sentences or reader-created “gist” sentences into questions. Point out that these questions can be a good study tool because they are linked to answers that the student has already located in the passage.

2. Give students selected practice passages and instruct them to apply the full question-generation strategy. Provide feedback and encouragement as needed.

Tips:

Use “Gist” Sentences to Organize Student Research Notes. When students are writing research papers, they often find it challenging to synthesize their scattered research notes into an orderly outline with sequentially presented main ideas. Students who have mastered the skill of assembling key ideas into “gist” sentences can identify their most important research notes, copy these notes individually onto index cards, and group cards with related notes. The student can then write a single “gist” sentence for each pile of note cards and use these sentences as the starting point for a paper outline.

Collect Exemplary Examples of Student-Generated Questions as Study Aids. If your class is using an assigned textbook, you may want to collect well-written student-generated questions and share them with other students. Or assign students different sections of an article or book chapter and require that they ‘teach’ the content by presenting their text-generated questions and sharing the correct answers.

Select Student Questions As Quiz or Test Items. You can build classroom interest (and competition!) in using this question-generation strategy by occasionally using one or more student text-questions as quiz or test items.

References:

Davey, B., & McBride, S. (1986). Effects of question-generation training on reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 78*, 256-262.

Rosenshine, B., Meister, C., & Chapman, S. (1996). Teaching students to generate questions: A review of the intervention studies. *Review of Educational Research, 66*, 181-221.