

Elaine K. McEwan

# 40 Ways

to Support  
Struggling Readers in  
Content Classrooms,  
Grades 6-12



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# 1 Teach the Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers

*To assume that one can simply have students memorize and routinely execute a set of strategies is to misconceive the nature of strategic processing or executive control. Such rote applications of these procedures represents, in essence, a true oxymoron—non-strategic strategic processing.*

—Alexander and Murphy (1998, p. 33)

If the struggling readers in your content classroom routinely miss the point when “reading” content text, consider teaching them one or more of the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers. Cognitive strategies are the mental processes used by skilled readers to extract and construct meaning from text and to create knowledge structures in long-term memory. When these strategies are directly taught to and modeled for struggling readers, their comprehension and retention improve.

Struggling students often mistakenly believe they are reading when they are actually engaged in what researchers call *mindless reading* (Schooler, Reichle, & Halpern, 2004), zoning out while staring at the printed page. The opposite of mindless reading is the processing of text by highly effective readers using cognitive strategies. These strategies are described in a fascinating qualitative study that asked expert readers to think aloud regarding what was happening in their minds while they were reading. The lengthy scripts recording these spoken thoughts (i.e., think-alouds) are called *verbal protocols* (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). These

protocols were categorized and analyzed by researchers to answer specific questions, such as, What is the influence of prior knowledge on expert readers' strategies as they determine the main idea of a text? (Afflerbach, 1990b).

The protocols provide accurate "snapshots" and even "videos" of the ever-changing mental landscape that expert readers construct during reading. Researchers have concluded that reading is "constructively responsive—that is, good readers are always changing their processing in response to the text they are reading" (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, p. 2). Instructional Aid 1.1, which follows shortly, defines the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers.

According to the research, the most effective way to teach the seven strategies is directly and explicitly. Instructional Aid 1.2 provides a lesson plan template for teaching a cognitive strategy, while Instructional Aid 1.3 contains a sample lesson plan for teaching the summarizing strategy.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

McEwan, 2004. *7 Strategies of Highly Effective Readers: Using Cognitive Research to Boost K–8 Achievement*.

Wood, Woloshyn, & Willoughby, 1995. *Cognitive Strategy Instruction for Middle and High Schools*.

## RESEARCH ON THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING THE SEVEN STRATEGIES

Dole, 2000; Duffy, 2002.



Instructional Aid 1.1 Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers	
Strategy	Definition
Activating	"Priming the cognitive pump" in order to recall relevant prior knowledge and experiences from long-term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from text
Infering	Bringing together what is spoken (written) in the text, what is unspoken (unwritten) in the text, and what is already known by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text
Monitoring-Clarifying	Thinking about how and what one is reading, both during and after the act of reading, for purposes of determining if one is comprehending the text combined with the ability to clarify and fix up any mix-ups
Questioning	Engaging in learning dialogues with text (authors), peers, and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering
Searching-Selecting	Searching a variety of sources in order to select appropriate information to answer questions, define words and terms, clarify misunderstandings, solve problems, or gather information
Summarizing	Restating the meaning of text in one's own words—different words from those used in the original text
Visualizing-Organizing	Constructing a mental image or graphic organizer for the purpose of extracting and constructing meaning from the text

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*"The book's major strengths are its ease of use and the range of approaches to address many different reading issues. You can read straight through for a host of ideas, or you can pinpoint exactly which kind of strategy to explore."*

**—Kristie Mary Betts**, English Teacher  
Peak to Peak High School, Lafayette, CO

*"Bottom line: This book is reader friendly! Teachers in the content areas can quickly and easily find specific ideas to help students."*

**—Barbara L. Townsend**, Reading Specialist  
Elkhorn Area School District, WI

## Help for students who are overwhelmed, feel confused, can't remember, lack language skills, or just don't get it.

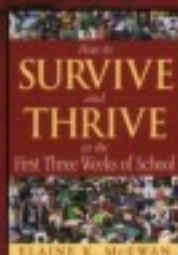
In today's era of accountability, teachers are expected to help all secondary students understand complex concepts and ideas and demonstrate proficiency on high-stakes tests. To promote success for struggling readers in all content areas, expert educator Elaine K. McEwan offers 40 user-friendly and easy-to-implement strategies in an invaluable text that includes three tables of contents (traditional, topical, and problem-solving) formatted for quick and easy reference.

Each of the 40 research-based and classroom-tested techniques features

- An intriguing quotation or definition to grab your attention
- A brief description of the method and suggestions for implementation
- Recommended resources to gain a more in-depth understanding of the method
- Research citations to demonstrate the power of the method to get results

Offering cross-references and advance organizers throughout, this book provides the specific yet comprehensive information you need to support all students with reading difficulties.

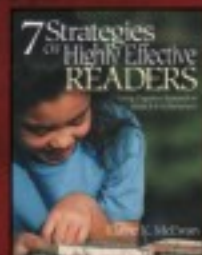
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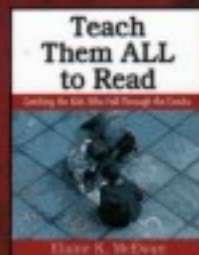
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