

# Literacy and Numeracy for NCEA Level 1 - Reading

## Activating prior knowledge

### Content

This resource supports the teaching and learning of comprehension strategies that can be used in conjunction with Unit Standard 26624: Read texts with understanding. 'Reading with understanding' assumes learners are *active* meaning makers, not passive consumers of text. This means that learners must be able to use *strategies* to facilitate meaning making and that they have a range of strategies they can employ when meaning breaks down. This resource is part of a set of resources which include teaching and learning sequences designed to develop learners' ability to apply a strategy. The sequence is suitable for learners in any context which requires reading texts.

### Alignment

The content aligns with step 4/5 of the Comprehension progression.

### Intent

After completing the teaching and learning sequence learners will be better able to understand the purpose and benefits of activating prior knowledge, use a simple strategy to being the process, and use a KWL strategy to guide their reading.

### Sequence

There are three parts to this sequence. Learners will:

- understand the purpose of activating prior knowledge
- use headings to cultivate a habit of activating prior knowledge
- use a KWL strategy.

## **1. Understand the purpose of activating prior knowledge**

Set up a discussion with learners regarding the advantages of being an expert reader.

Explain how activating prior knowledge has been found to improve both the readers' ability to make sense of content and their ability to recall information at a later date.

Activating prior knowledge:

- primes the mind for incoming information, which has been found to improve mental processing speed
- improves the integration of incoming information with what is already known
- sets the learner up well for using other strategies.

Include in the discussion the reasons why activating prior knowledge supports good reading. Ask learners what the advantages would be to them if they could read faster, understand more of what they read, and remember more of what they read.

### **Sell the concept of activating prior knowledge**

1. Activating prior knowledge is simply recalling what you already know about a topic, and using this to direct your reading (it's easy!).
2. Learners who deliberately activate their prior knowledge retain more information and retain it longer (it makes you smarter!).
3. Activating prior knowledge improves comprehension. It is an underutilised, easy, and effective way to help you understand what you read (it makes reading easier!).

## **2. Use headings to cultivate a habit of activating prior knowledge**

Many learners are unsure of what they should actually think about before they read. Below is a simple strategy that can be used. Learners skim and scan the text, noting the headings and subheadings. They then reconstruct these headings into questions and answer them to the best of their ability *before* they read the full text. Once they have read the text, they evaluate their original answers. Ideally, this would become a mental habit before reading any text.

**Step one:** Hand out a text to the learners such as a course workbook. A text with several headings and subheadings is essential. Have learners skim and scan the text, noting the section headings and subheadings.

**Step two:** Ask learners to identify the first heading. Write the heading on the board and ask learners how this might be turned into a question.

For example:

### **Chainsaw safety equipment**

*What equipment makes chainsaw use safer?*

*How does equipment prevent accidents?*

*Does the equipment have to be worn?*

*What are the individual pieces of equipment?*

**Step three:** Ask learners to break into groups of two or three and try and answer the questions *without* reading the text. Then ask the groups to share their ideas and write these on the board.

**Step four:** Ask the class to read the first section to themselves and to check if it answers the question and if it includes what was already known about the topic, the learners' prior knowledge. Discuss as a whole class.

**Step five:** Ask learners to repeat the process individually for the rest of the text. Once the learners have completed this, discuss it as a whole class.

**Final note:** Tell learners this is an advanced strategy which can be used to activate prior knowledge and to self-assess their own comprehension. It does not have to be written as it can be done mentally before reading.

### **3. Use a KWL strategy**

The KWL is a well-known graphic organiser designed to facilitate the activation of prior knowledge. It helps raise questions and evaluate the answers. It is best to incorporate this strategy into the learners' practice and not simply use as a 'one off'.

KWL stands for:

- What do you **Know**?
- What do you **Want** to know?
- What did you **Learn**?

**Step one:** Project or write the KWL chart on the board. Hand out a text to the class or use a course workbook.

**Step two:** Ask learners to skim and scan the text and share what they already know about the topic. Write these into the ‘What we know’ column.

**Note:** Skimming and scanning usually refers to reading the title, headings and subheadings, and taking note of text features. It can also include reading the first sentence of each paragraph, the introduction or summary.

**Step three:** Ask learners to articulate ‘what they want to know’. These questions can link to each of the ‘what we know’ statements. For example:

| What we know  | What we want to know   | What we learned |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Chainsaw operators have to wear several pieces of safety equipment. | What pieces of safety equipment are there?                       |                 |
| Chainsaws have safety features built in to them.                    | What are the safety features of a chainsaw and how do they work? |                 |

**Step four:** Have the learners read the text. Then ask them if the specific answers to their questions were in the text. Write these on the board. It may be useful to develop further questions.

**Note:** This strategy’s real usefulness is when learners begin to adopt it into their own personal reading and study time. Learners can use a template of the chart, or design it themselves. It should be used on a regular basis, when learners are reading texts.

**Final note:** A completed, and authentic, series of KWLs might be used as part of a portfolio in support of Unit Standard 26624.