

Inquiry chart (I-chart)

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension



Best for:

- Year level: 5–9
- Phase of learning: transfer

Overview

Description	<p>Using a chart with guiding questions, students gather information about a topic from multiple text sources, then organise, summarise, compare and evaluate that information.</p> <p>This strategy is suitable for research in any learning area.</p>
Learning focus (based on National Literacy Learning Progression)	<p>Comprehension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distinguish fact from opinion (UnT7) • compare and contrast texts on the same topic to identify how authors represent the same ideas differently (UnT7) • evaluate the accuracy within and across texts on the same topic (UnT8) • identify the main themes or concepts in complex texts by synthesising key ideas or information (UnT9) • summarise the text identifying key details only (UnT9) • build meaning by actively linking ideas from several texts or a range of digital sources (UnT9) • distil information from a number of texts according to task and purpose (e.g. uses graphic organisers) (UnT9) • draw inferences using evidence from the text and discounting possible inferences that are not supported by the text (UnT10) • judiciously select and synthesise evidence from multiple texts to support ideas and arguments (UnT11) • analyse the credibility and validity of primary and secondary sources (UnT11) <p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • judiciously select texts for a specific research task (UnT9)
Teacher preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select a topic for study or negotiate the topic with students. 2. Develop several significant questions to focus the inquiry process. 3. Construct the I-chart (see Table 1), writing the guiding questions in the top row. The chart should be large enough for the whole class to see. When the students are familiar with I-charts, they should be involved in its construction, including the development of guiding questions. 4. Collect a variety of materials (e.g. textbooks, websites, posters, reference books) dealing with the topic. Record details about the sources on the I-chart. When students are ready, they should be increasingly involved in locating relevant sources.

Suggested implementation

Interacting phase

1. Discuss with students what they know about the topic questions. Record shared information in the 'What I think I know' row, regardless of its accuracy at this time, e.g. in Table 1, note that some mammals can fly and it is not true that only humans have hands and legs.
2. Model appropriate active reading comprehension strategies in guided reading lessons. Demonstrate processes such as making accurate, succinct notes on the I-chart. Model how to generate new questions.
3. Provide opportunities for students to practise during collaborative and independent reading. This phase may last from days to weeks, depending on the number of sources and the skill level of students.
4. Provide opportunities for students to work in pairs or individually to complete the I-chart using a variety of texts.



Table 1: I-chart

Topic or inquiry question: Mammals

	What defines a mammal as distinct from other animals?	In what ways are mammals alike?	In what ways are mammals different from other animals?	How are mammals grouped?	Interesting facts	New questions
What I think I know about the topic	<i>Have hair Can't fly</i>	<i>Have skeletons</i>	<i>Only humans have hands and legs</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>People and kangaroos are both animals</i>	<i>Can mammals be marsupials?</i>
Source 1 Author, date, Title, publication place, publisher						
Source 2						
Source 3						
Summary						

Integrating and evaluating phase

5. Summarise: Use the think-aloud strategy during modelled writing lessons to demonstrate how to synthesise the recorded information into one cohesive answer for each question (see [Further reading](#)). Model the process of moving beyond the stated facts and refining the language to account for converging as well as conflicting information. Record the summaries on the I-chart. This is also an opportunity for students to evaluate their initial brainstorming and to refine their understandings, e.g. in Table 1, students might refine the statement 'People and kangaroos are both animals' to 'People and kangaroos are both mammals'. Moreover, they might verify this against the features of mammals discovered through research.
6. Compare: Once the I-chart is complete, model the process of comparing information gathered from individual sources with summarised prior knowledge and beliefs. Lead discussions to help students refine, evaluate or correct concepts or facts using new information in the chart. In writing lessons, explicitly model strategies and skills for integrating and evaluating information. Provide repeated opportunities to practise in small groups before allowing students to undertake these tasks independently.
7. Research and report: Provide opportunities for students to work in collaborative groups to continue researching the new questions that have accumulated on the I-chart. Work with groups who have specific needs to consolidate developing skills. Students report back to the whole class about findings concerning the new questions generated and recorded on the I-chart.

Reflecting and reporting individual learning

8. Lead discussions to raise students' awareness of active reading and writing strategies explored and practised during the I-chart activity. Encourage students to discuss:
 - the use of a range of active reading comprehension strategies
 - aspects of the I-chart activity with which they were successful
 - aspects of the strategy that worked well
 - actions that could be taken to improve use of the I-chart next time
 - applications to other aspects of their work
 - possible adaptations to the I-chart for different purposes.

More information

- Teachers should lead the process when introducing the I-chart strategy. Once students are familiar with the process, they can gradually take responsibility by selecting topics, generating questions, identifying sources and deciding what to record on the I-chart.
- Synthesising and summarising are complex processes in which main ideas must be separated from supporting details. Some students will find this difficult and may need a series of prompts to help them.


Further reading

'Think-alouds', *Reading Rockets: Classroom strategies*, WETA Public Broadcasting, USA, www.readingrockets.org/strategies/think_alouds.

'Modelling through think alouds', *Literacy Teaching Toolkit*, State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training),
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/speakinglistening/Pages/teachingpracmodelling.aspx

Acknowledgments

This strategy is an adaptation of the KWL strategy and draws on ideas from Hoffman, JV 1992, 'Critical reading/thinking across the curriculum: Using I-charts to support learning', *Language Arts*, vol. 69 pp.121–27.

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