Years 3, 5 and 7 Literacy Test:
Ideas for test preparation: Locating information
Locating information – strategies to help during testing

The ability to locate and retrieve information is one of the areas assessed by the literacy tests. Readers need to be able to identify and understand what is explicitly stated in texts. To do so, they need to locate the information within the text that is the focus of their purpose for reading. Whether it is to answer a literal question or to locate the basis of an inference or to make a critical or evaluative judgment – they need to find specific information within the text. As readers read, they predict, sample, and either confirm or reframe their predictions before moving on or rereading.

Students need to develop strategies to manage all these reading processes.

Developing strategic reading behaviour means that students need to know

- the reading strategy
- how to use it
- when and where to use it
- why they should use it.

Students need to have a strong, personal repertoire of these strategies before they come to the test. They need to have used them successfully. This is good test preparation – good teaching.
Watching students take the tests or do trial units has shown us two problems. First, some students don’t read the stimulus material. They try to reason the answer from their prior knowledge. The second problem is that students read the stimulus once, but don’t go back to reread and confirm or rethink the answer. So there is a need for students to have in their repertoire of activities strategies that help them to do this. Here are some suggestions.

**Strategies for managing**

One simple way of encouraging students to keep going back to stimulus material is to have them fold the magazine and place it beside their test paper so they can easily work between the two.

**Strategies for predicting**

Show the students how to use the title of the stimulus materials to make predictions about the purpose, content and form of the stimulus text. Have children ask questions like

- What is this about?
- What do I need to think about?
- What do I already know?
- What do I need to know?
- Where have I seen texts like this before?
- What do I think I am going to be asked about?

Teach students to use textual features such as headings or visual information such as pictures or diagrams to extend, rethink or even confirm their predictions. Headings and other signposts give information about how the ideas are being linked and as well as the relative importance of ideas.

Visual information is a feature of many modern-day texts. Not only do these augment the written information, they frequently carry the primary or significant levels of meaning. A good prediction strategy is to read the visual aspects of the text such as diagrams or photographs first. Then students should read the text to confirm, rethink or extend the predictions they have made.

For more teaching ideas about visual texts see

For older students, a prediction strategy suited to the testing situation is to have them read a few of the questions first. Students need practice to develop a sense of just how many questions they can hold in their heads before they begin to read. For this strategy, students also need to develop an understanding that questions operate differently. They need to predict what kind of question it is and therefore how it might be answered.

**Strategies for monitoring and confirming**

As they read the stimulus material, students need to monitor what they are reading. They need to know that they are making meaning and how they are making meaning. They need to develop the self–questioning strategies that are part of predicting, sampling, confirming and, if necessary, revising meaning.
Here are some strategies that students may find useful as they read the stimulus material.

**The Hand Strategy**

**Who**
Students in Years 1-3

**When**
Readers are monitoring meaning as they read.

**Where**
This strategy is most appropriate to narrative texts.

**How**
The fingers on one hand are labelled *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and *why*.

As readers find the information that relates to the label on a particular finger, they tap that finger on the desk.
The labelling of the fingers reminds the students of the kind of information they are looking for.
Always label the same finger the same way when teaching this strategy so that students know immediately what information they have found and what they haven’t.
If, when they finish reading, students have fingers that they haven’t tapped onto the desk, encourage them to question whether or not the information was in the text. They then need to decide whether to reread or continue reading.

**Why**
The physical movement of tapping on the table creates a pause in the reading and gives a student the chance to register the information they have found. It also reinforces the cognitive decision they have made. Students can use this strategy quickly and silently when reading stimulus material.

This strategy is supported by discussions that encourage students to look at texts in different ways and by strategies such as concept mapping during reading and writing which help students identify and track information.

See the poster *Here’s a way to look at a story* – available from the *Test information for teachers* page at www.qsa.qld.edu.au/testing.
**The Q Chart**

As students become better readers, they need to generate better questions as they read. They should ask themselves questions that sample the overarching ideas of the text, the details that support those ideas, as well as framing questions that will allow them to make inferences. The Question chart is a teaching activity which models, in a systematic way, some of the questions effective readers generate.

The simplest form of question sits in the upper left-hand corner. This question is a literal question – Who is the main character? As questions move further to the right they became more inferential and more difficult. A question that appears in the bottom right hand corner would be quite difficult. For example, how might Micah have survived after he had left the Abbey and Henri? (*A Company of Fools: Deborah Ellis*) or how might the Big Bad Wolf have felt when he blew down the house?

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After teaching students how to use the chart to form their own questions, students could be given the chart to generate their own questions. A large version could be put on a notice board so that students could generate different questions in response to a text.

**Key word in the margin strategy**

This strategy is a variation on underlining key ideas. Like underlining, it is the active decision-making which makes the strategy effective. The decisions associated with this strategy are conceptually more difficult than those associated with underlining, which is a recognition or identification strategy.

**Who** Year 5–7 students

**When** Students need to monitor meaning while reading. They need to identify key ideas for rereading and confirmation.

**Where** This is well suited to texts that are information heavy.
Questions about reading

This strategy developed by Raphael (1982) asks students to infer the demands of the questions before they begin to read. It teaches them to identify types of questions and to determine the sources of information in the text to answer questions. Raphael and other researchers claim that students who use this strategy are better able to answer comprehension questions.

Raphael described four relationships:

- right there in the text – RT
- think and search – TS
- author and you – A&Y
- on your own – OYO

Right there questions can be answered by information that is explicitly stated in the text. These are called text-explicit questions. The reader simply needs to locate the information.

The answers to think and search questions are not directly stated in the text. Information that is there needs to be interpreted, or linked together to reach an answer. These questions are called text-implicit.

Both these questions use information that is IN THE BOOK.

The last two questions ask readers to draw on their own experience. The answers to these questions are either wholly or partially drawn from information that is IN THE READER’S HEAD.

The answer to author and you questions can be found by using information that is partly in the text. The information that is in the text suggests what prior knowledge a reader should use to make sense of the text and sometimes, what links they should make.

Not every thing can go in the text. Authors make judgments about the prior knowledge of the audience for which they are writing. They assume some background knowledge. For example, What does the average Year 4 student know about frogs? Then they build on this assumption and make explicit in the text information they judge to be new or important to the reader. This means that not all the information a reader needs is within the text in front of them. Some information will be entirely outside the text, some will be partially within the text, and some will be explicitly stated.
The answer to on your own questions is not in the text. Readers are expected to use their own knowledge about what goes on in the world to ‘read between the lines’. These are often the most difficult questions. They ask readers to make judgments, or evaluate or form opinions.

For a poster accompanying this strategy, In the book or in your head, see the Test information for teachers page at www.qsa.qld.edu.au/testing

Raphael found that very young children could distinguish between questions that were within the text, whether implicit or explicit, and those that were outside it. This is a useful place to begin teaching this strategy. She used the phrases In the book and In my head with these children. By the middle grades, Raphael found students were able to discriminate between her four question types.

Who Years 2–10
When When readers predict where and how they’ll find the answers to questions. When students need to confirm the sources of their answers.
How Raphael suggested four teaching principles to introduce her question–answer strategy.
1. Move from shorter to longer pieces of text.
2. Begin with straightforward questions and then move to more complex ones.
3. Give students immediate feedback about their categorisation.
4. Begin with small-group practice and move to independent practice.
Begin with year 2, teach them to discriminate whether the information is in their head or in the book.
Why Students need to be able to confirm their judgments from the text even if they modify or reject what the text is saying. The use of prior knowledge has both a positive and negative influence. Reliance on prior knowledge can mean that the text is not understood.