



## How To: Improve Reading Comprehension With a Cognitive Strategy: Ask-Read-Tell

Good reading comprehension requires that students monitor their understanding while reading a passage. At the point of performance--when a student picks up a text and prepares to read--there are 3 crucial phases that improve comprehension (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997): pre-reading (the reader creates a reading plan), reading (the reader monitors his or her understanding of the text while reading and applies strategies to clarify understanding of the text), and post-reading (the reader continues to think about the passage after reading and encode key details into long-term memory).

Poor readers often lack the skills to effectively monitor their comprehension of assigned passages and apply fix-up skills when needed. One means to help students to develop these self-monitoring skills is to teach them a cognitive strategy : ART: Ask-Read-Tell (McCallum et al., 2010). Whenever the student is assigned a challenging passage, he or she is trained to apply a 3-step ART sequence, which maps to the pre-reading/reading/post-reading timeline:

1. **ASK:** Before reading the text, the student looks over the title of the passage, **asks** what the topic is likely to be, considers what he or she already knows about that topic, and generates 2 questions that the student hopes to answer through reading.
2. **READ:** While **reading**, the student stops after each paragraph to query whether he or she has adequately understood that section of the passage and, if necessary, applies comprehension fix-up skills.
3. **TELL:** After reading, the student attempts to answer the 2 questions posed earlier based on the content just read. Finally, the student meets with a peer partner, and participants **tell** each other what questions and answers they produced.

**Preparation.** In preparation for each ART session, the teacher:

- selects a challenging reading passage to be the focus of the ART comprehension strategy.
- provides each student with a copy of the *ASK-READ-TELL (ART): Student Worksheet* (attached).

**Procedures.** This intervention is student-directed. A full explanation of the ART steps can be found in the attached *ASK-READ-TELL (ART): Student Worksheet*.

When using the ASK-READ-TELL strategy, the teacher:

1. hands out the reading passage.
2. directs students to read the passage independently (either in-class or as a take-home assignment).
3. instructs students to complete the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading sections of the *ASK-READ-TELL (ART): Student Worksheet* as part of the reading assignment.
4. pairs students off after the assignment to compare the questions and answers that each generated from the assigned passage.



**Training.** The ASK-READ-TELL strategy is simple to use. However, the teacher should ensure that students are trained in the proper use of this strategy, beginning with teacher demonstration and moving to group practice with instructor feedback before students are directed to use ASK-READ-TELL independently.

## References

McCallum, R. S., Krohn, K. R., Skinner, C. H., Hilton-Prillhart, A., Hopkins, M. Waller, S., & Polite, F. (2010). Improving reading comprehension of at-risk high-school students: The art of reading program. *Psychology in the Schools, 48*(1), 78-86.

Pressley, M., & Wharton-McDonald, R. (1997). Skilled comprehension and its development through instruction. *School Psychology Review, 26*(3), 448-467.



# ASK-READ-TELL (ART): Student Worksheet (McCallum et al., 2010)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Passage/Page Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use the checklist below to guide your reading of this passage. Check off each step when completed.

## Step 1: Goal Before Reading: I look at the title of the passage and ASK myself these questions:

- What is the **main topic** of the passage? What does it discuss?
- What **information** do I **already know** about this topic?

Based on the title, what are **two** questions about this passage's topic that I would like to have answered in my reading?:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ ?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Step 2: Goal While Reading: I READ the passage carefully for full understanding:

- While reading, I stop after each paragraph to ask, "Did I **understand** what I just read?"
- If I **do** understand the paragraph, I mark it with a plus sign (+) and continue reading.  
If I **do not** understand the paragraph, I mark it with a minus (-) sign and:
  - reread the paragraph;
  - slow my reading;
  - focus my *full* attention on what I am reading;
  - underline any words that I do not know and try to figure them out from the reading (context).

## Step 3: Goal After Reading: I TELL what I learned from the passage:

- Based on my reading, here are answers to my **two** questions from Step 1:
  1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- When I meet with my peer partner, we **TELL** each other **what we learned** from the passage, sharing our questions and answers. Then we talk about any other interesting information from the reading.