

A Protocol for Close Reading

What is close reading?

Close reading is a form of guided instruction that focuses on multiple readings and rich discussion about a complex piece of text. The teacher uses text-dependent questions to drive the discussion, and to provide students with authentic purposes for re-reading. It isn't uncommon for students to read a passage once, read it quickly and rather superficially, and then announce, "I'm done!" Sophisticated readers understand that the nature of some texts requires that they be read more than once. Even with less dense text, it is essential to glean the details at both the explicit and implicit levels in order to fully understand the reading. So first and foremost, close reading requires a willingness to return to the text to read part or even all of it more than once. The close reading may extend over several lessons, each time deepening students' understanding of the text.

What is text-dependent questioning?

Since novice readers haven't yet fully developed this habit, teachers use text-dependent questions to cause them to return to the text. It is important to note that text-dependent questions should not be confined only to the literal meaning of the passage; while important, this does not fully capture the deeper meaning of the work. Therefore, text-dependent questions should also challenge students to examine the inferential levels of meaning, such as noting the mood and tone of a piece, or the author's purpose, or how the artful choice of words elevates the quality of the reading. These should be developed in advance of the lesson in order to ensure that the discussion regularly guides students back to the reading.

Select a Suitably Complex Text

Remember that what makes a text complex is not decoding--it's content. Choose a short piece of text that is worthy of this level of attention. Keep three factors in mind: the quantitative measure, the qualitative values, and the reader and task demands. Overall, the text should be challenging enough to stretch students. You're working within your students' Zone of Proximal Development.

Establish the Purpose for Reading

Identify clear learning targets for students that include content and language goals for the reading. Use a minimal amount of frontloading so that students are afforded the opportunity to discover the reading. Remember, you don't need to frontload as much when you know there will be multiple readings and great discussions.

First Reading: Go for the Flow

Let students read the text for enjoyment, to figure out the gist of the article, and to gain a sense of the flow. For younger readers, this is likely to be performed by the teacher as a read aloud or shared reading. Older readers will read independently. Of course, there may be students who need more support, and they should receive it. Keep in mind that you're not differentiating the text; you're differentiating the support.

Second Reading: Read with a Pencil

After they have read or listened to the text once, encourage them to annotate the text, focusing on the purposes for today's reading. Keep in mind that highlighting is not annotation, and that students should be encouraged to write questions, comments, and notes to themselves (not just circling and underlining). These annotations should later support their writing. Look for patterns as you observe their annotations, as this provides you with valuable formative assessment information regarding their confusions.

Discussion: Partner Talk to Check Meaning

Prompt students to briefly talk with one another while you circulate and listen in on their conversations. Again, this is a useful in determining your next instructional moves.

Third Reading: Teacher-led Shared Reading and Think-aloud

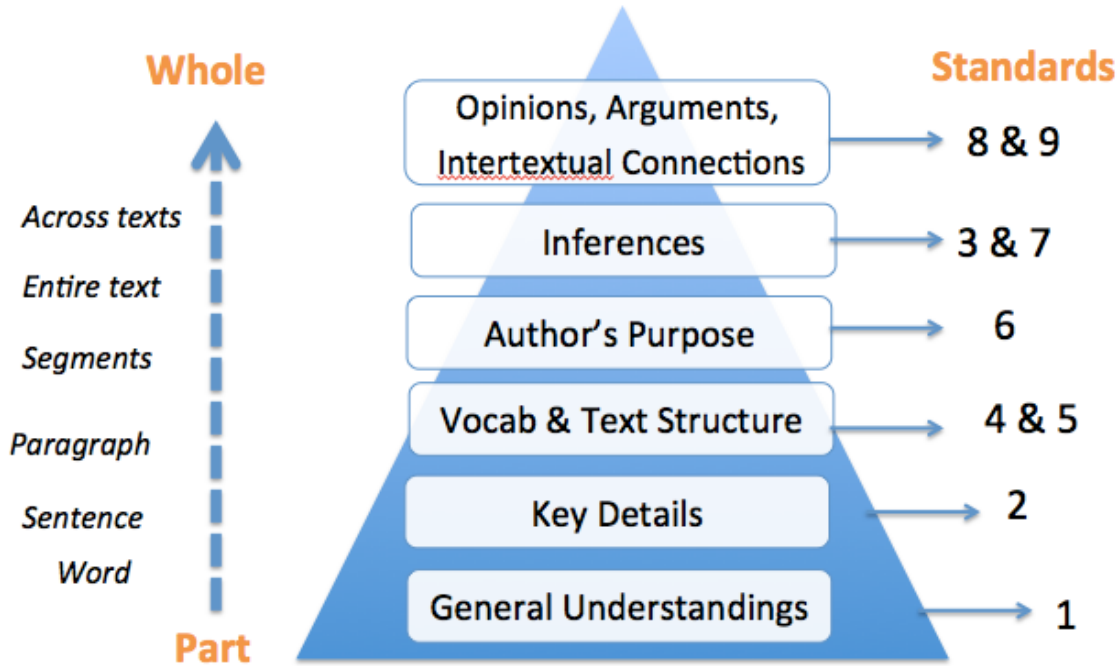
Explain to students that you will read the selection aloud to them (or a portion of it that you have identified for attention) while they follow along silently with their own copy of the reading. Tell them that from time to time you will explain your thinking to them as you resolve difficult words using structural and contextual clues. As you read the passage, orient students to where you are in the text so they are tracking the correct portion.

Discussion of the Text with Text-dependent Questions

This is the heart of your lesson, and may be divided into several lessons. These text-dependent questions cause students to return to the text, and guide students to deeper levels of understanding of the text. The progression of questions moves from literal meaning to inferential, and prompts students to apply critical thinking skills. Remind students to add to their annotations throughout the discussion.

- *General understanding questions* are posed in order to determine whether students grasp the overall meaning of the text. While they may appear more global in nature, they are crafted so that students are required to explain as well as describe.
- *Key detail questions* build on the foundational knowledge needed for general understanding by drawing attention to critical details that relate to the whole.
- *Vocabulary and text structure questions* bridge the literal level meanings of a text to move toward inferential interpretations. Questions regarding word choice, use of figurative language, and organization of information further build students' understanding of the author's craft.
- *Author's purpose questions* invite students to step back from the text in order to examine the reading's effect on an audience, and to look closely for clues that illuminate his or her intentions. These questions may focus on genre and narration, or require students to engage in critical analysis in determining whether another viewpoint is missing.
- *Inferencing questions* further the progression toward deeper understanding by requiring students to locate the nuances of a literary text, examine the arguments contained in a persuasive piece, or probe the details of major ideas in an informational text passage.
- *Opinions, arguments, and intertextual connection questions* forward students' thinking about the broader meanings of a text by foregrounding it against a backdrop of personal experiences, and by inviting comparisons across texts. When these questions are delayed until after students have had a chance to deeply understand a text, the discussions themselves are richer and more complex.

Progression of Text-dependent Questions



Extend Understanding Through Writing

Time spent on text should result in writing of some kind. Emergent writers may engage in shared writing with their teacher, while older students will write collaboratively and independently. Design the performance task in such a way that it draws students back to the text to cite evidence.

Adapted from: Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2013). *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work Series*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.