

NOTICING COMPREHENSION BREAKDOWNS IS A LEARNED SKILL

A practical guide for becoming a more independent reader and thinker

Comprehension monitoring means paying attention to your own understanding while you read, listen, or learn.

It involves learning to ask: “**Do I actually understand this?**” and “**Where did I stop understanding?**”

It Doesn't Always Happen Automatically

Sometimes we assume, “**If I don't understand something, I'll know.**” But that isn't always what happens. You can read every word correctly, remember what you read, repeat what someone taught you, and even understand individual sentences - yet still miss the **meaning, connection, or reasoning** behind what you read.

READ I can read the words.	REMEMBER I can recall what was said.	UNDERSTAND? Can I explain the meaning?
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Learning to catch the moment when understanding becomes unclear is part of developing comprehension.

What Are We Training?

The goal is not simply to get the right answer. We are learning to recognize our own understanding. Over time, the goal is to move from **someone else noticing that I don't understand** to **I notice that I don't understand** - and eventually to identifying exactly what I don't understand and knowing what to do about it.

What Does a Comprehension Breakdown Look Like?

- “I read it, but I can't explain it.”
- “I can repeat it, but I can't say it differently.”
- “I understand these two ideas, but I don't understand how they connect.”
- “I don't know what the main point is.”
- “I understand the conclusion, but I don't understand why.”
- “Something doesn't seem to fit, and I don't know why.”
- “I realized I assumed something that wasn't actually said.”

These are not reasons to give up and move on. They are signals to **stop and investigate your understanding**.

Find the Exact Problem

Instead of only saying “I don't understand,” ask: “What exactly don't I understand?”

WORD	MEANING
“I don't understand this word.”	“I can read this sentence, but I don't know what it means.”
CONNECTION	REASONING
“I understand both ideas, but I don't understand how they connect.”	“I understand the conclusion, but I don't understand why.”

A helpful sentence: “I understand _____, but I don't understand _____.”

The more specifically you identify the problem, the easier it becomes to work through it or ask for help.

What Do I Do When I Don't Understand?

STOP → REREAD → FIND → BREAK → CONNECT → EXPLAIN

1. STOP	Don't continue reading simply because you want to finish.
2. REREAD	Read the difficult part again, slowly.
3. FIND	Identify exactly what you don't understand.
4. BREAK	Break the information into smaller pieces.
5. CONNECT	Ask how those pieces relate to one another.
6. EXPLAIN	Try explaining the meaning in your own words.

If you still don't understand, you now know more specifically **what you need to ask about**.

Mark It While You Read

?	↔	!
I don't understand this yet.	I don't understand how these ideas connect.	I think I just understood something important.

The purpose isn't to mark everything. The marks help you notice what is happening in your own thinking while you read.

Practice

Read:

"Although the plan didn't work at first, the team learned valuable lessons and made improvements."

Before looking for someone else's explanation, ask yourself:

- Do I understand all the words?
- What happened?
- What is the main idea?
- How are the two parts of the sentence connected?
- What does the word "although" tell me about their relationship?
- Can I explain the sentence in my own words?

If you realize, **"I understand that the plan didn't work, and I understand that the team improved, but I don't understand how those ideas connect,"** you've just noticed a comprehension breakdown. Now use the process: **STOP → REREAD → FIND → BREAK → CONNECT → EXPLAIN.**

What Growth Looks Like

AT FIRST	Someone else notices that I don't understand.
THEN	Someone helps me notice where my understanding broke down.
WITH PRACTICE	I begin noticing when I don't understand.
THEN	I can identify exactly what I don't understand.
NEXT	I know which strategy I should try.
EVENTUALLY	I can work through some confusion independently - or ask a specific question when I still need help.

Remember

The goal is **not to never become confused**. Confusion will happen whenever we are learning. The goal is to become better at **NOTICING → IDENTIFYING → REPAIRING → UNDERSTANDING.**

KEEP THIS BESIDE YOU WHILE YOU STUDY

1. Did I understand what I just read?
2. Where exactly did I lose understanding?
3. Is the problem a **WORD, MEANING, CONNECTION, or REASONING** problem?
4. **STOP → REREAD → FIND → BREAK → CONNECT → EXPLAIN**
5. If I still need help, what specific question can I ask?

Noticing comprehension breakdowns is a learned skill. The more you practice recognizing and working through them, the more independent you can become as a reader and thinker.