



## Reciprocal Teaching

Palincsar (1986) describes the concept of reciprocal teaching:

**"Definition:** Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher and students take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading this dialogue.

**Purpose:** The purpose of reciprocal teaching is to facilitate a group effort between teacher and students as well as among students in the task of bringing meaning to the text. Each strategy was selected for the following purpose:

- **Summarizing** provides the opportunity to identify and integrate the most important information in the text. Text can be summarized across sentences, across paragraphs, and across the passage as a whole. When the students first begin the reciprocal teaching procedure, their efforts are generally focused at the sentence and paragraph levels. As they become more proficient, they are able to integrate at the paragraph and passage levels.
- **Question generating** reinforces the summarizing strategy and carries the learner one more step along in the comprehension activity. When students generate questions, they first identify the kind of information that is significant enough to provide the substance for a question. They then pose this information in question form and self-test to ascertain that they can indeed answer their own question. Question generating is a flexible strategy to the extent that students can be taught and encouraged to generate questions at many levels. For example, some school situations require that students master supporting detail information; others require that the students be able to infer or apply new information from text.
- **Clarifying** is an activity that is particularly important when working with students who have a history of comprehension difficulty. These students may believe that the purpose of reading is saying the words correctly; they may not be particularly uncomfortable that the words, and in fact the passage, are not making sense. When the students are asked to clarify, their attention is called to the fact that there may be many reasons why text is difficult to understand (e.g., new vocabulary, unclear reference words, and unfamiliar and perhaps difficult concepts). They are taught to be alert to the effects of such impediments to comprehension and to take the necessary measures to restore meaning (e.g., reread, ask for help).
- **Predicting** occurs when students hypothesize what the author will discuss next in the text. In order to do this successfully, students must activate the relevant background knowledge that they already possess regarding the topic. The students

have a purpose for reading: to confirm or disprove their hypotheses. Furthermore, the opportunity has been created for the students to link the new knowledge they will encounter in the text with the knowledge they already possess. The predicting strategy also facilitates use of text structure as students learn that headings, subheadings, and questions imbedded in the text are useful means of anticipating what might occur next.

In summary, each of these strategies was selected as a means of aiding students to construct meaning from text as well as a means of monitoring their reading to ensure that they are in fact understanding what they read.

**Research Base:** For the past five years, Palincsar and Brown (1985) have conducted a series of studies to determine the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching. The initial studies were conducted by adult tutors working with middle school students in pairs and by Chapter 1 teachers working with their small reading groups averaging five in number. The students were identified to be fairly adequate decoders but very poor comprehenders, typically performing at least two years below grade level on standardized measures of comprehension. Instruction took place over a period of 20 consecutive school days. The effectiveness was evaluated by having the students read passages about 450 to 500 words in length and answer 10 comprehension questions from recall. The students completed five of these passages before reciprocal teaching instruction began and one during each day of instruction. Performance on these assessment passages indicated that all but one of the experimental students achieved criterion performance, which we identified as 70 percent accuracy for four out of five consecutive days.

These results were in contrast to the group of control students, none of whom achieved criterion performance. In addition, qualitative changes were observed in the dialogue that occurred daily. For example, the experimental students functioned more independently of the teachers and improved the quality of their summaries over time. In addition, students' ability to write summaries, predict the kinds of questions teachers and tests ask, and detect incongruities in text improved. Finally, these improvements were reflected in the regular classroom as the experimental students' percentile rankings went from 20 to 50 and above on texts administered in social studies and science classes.

When the same instructional procedure was implemented in larger classes with groups ranging in size from 8 to 18, 71 percent of the students achieved criterion performance as opposed to 19 percent of the control students who were involved in individualized skill instruction. Furthermore, teachers observed fewer behavior problems in their reciprocal teaching groups than in their control groups." (pp. 19-20)



## References

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## **Common Questions About Reciprocal Teaching**

This section contains a series of questions and answers whose purpose is to review the content of the book and to provide information that you may need as you teach your students reciprocal teaching strategies.

### **1. What are the four reciprocal teaching strategies? Where did they originate?**

The four strategies—predict, question, clarify, and summarize—were originally studied by Palincsar and Brown in the early 1980s. The researchers first used the strategies in a paragraph-by-paragraph scaffolded approach with struggling middle school students. Palincsar and Brown and others expanded the research into use of the strategies and discovered that reciprocal teaching strategies were beneficial to students in a variety of grade levels and settings, including peer groups and interventions (Carter, 1997; Palincsar, Brown, & Campione, 1989; Palincsar & Klenk, 1991, 1992).

Other researchers and curriculum developers (Cooper et al., 1999; Lubliner, 2001) have created lessons for reciprocal teaching, but they have carefully maintained the integrity and intent of its original design.

### **2. What results might I expect if I use reciprocal teaching consistently with my students?**

I am always amazed at how quickly I begin to see results with reciprocal teaching. The research verifies that reciprocal teaching can yield results in a relatively short amount of time: Palincsar and Brown (1984) found that students who scored around 30% on a comprehension assessment scored 70–80% after just 15–20 days of instruction using reciprocal teaching. After one year, the students maintained the growth (Palincsar & Klenk, 1991). In the schools where I work, which are diverse ethnically and in terms of urban, suburban, and rural settings, the students' reading levels rise one half to one full grade level in just 18–20 reciprocal teaching sessions (usually two to three per week).

Even though positive growth may be measured in such a short period of time, I recommend continuing the reciprocal teaching instruction for approximately 76 lessons, or most of the school year, because researchers report even more dramatic results or formal gains in reading level after an average of this many lessons (Cooper et al., 2000). In one of the inner-city schools where I work, struggling readers experienced rapid growth of one to two years in reading level after just three months. By the end of the school year, three months later, more students reached the target level and

Human Development, 2000) suggests using cooperative learning with multiple strategies and highly recommends reciprocal teaching as an effective teaching practice that improves reading comprehension.

**6. I am so busy that I can barely teach what I have on my agenda now. How can I fit reciprocal teaching strategies into what I am doing already?**

You do not have to overhaul your curriculum to fit reciprocal teaching strategies into your schedule. After introducing the four strategies to your students, you can incorporate the strategies easily into lessons using the district-adopted texts for reading, social studies, and science. Some teachers even ask students to use predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing during math lessons. Reciprocal teaching can be incorporated easily into your school day.

**7. What is your best piece of advice for using reciprocal teaching?**

Be consistent. If you really want results with struggling readers, use the strategies at least twice a week in an intervention group, and with the rest of the class use reciprocal teaching two to three times per week in either whole-class, guided reading, or literature circle settings. Using the strategies once a week or just a few times per month may help students somewhat, but students need consistent exposure to the strategies to benefit greatly from them.

**8. What foundations must be in place to achieve the maximum results with reciprocal teaching?**

Whether using reciprocal teaching in whole-class sessions, guided reading groups, or literature circles, there are some foundations that make the instruction more effective. These essentials include scaffolding, thinking aloud, using cooperative learning, and facilitating metacognition.

Scaffolding is the umbrella for the other three foundations, and it simply means good teaching through teacher modeling that usually consists of a think-aloud and student participation with feedback from the teacher or peers. A scaffolded lesson also allows time for metacognition or reflection on the use of the strategies and how they helped the reader understand the text. When these components are in place, reciprocal teaching lessons may yield better results than if the foundations are not addressed.

**15. Are there any common problems that students experience with reciprocal teaching?**

Some students may experience difficulty when first learning reciprocal teaching strategies. Their problems may include the following:

- Predicting: Students may not make logical predictions based on clues from the text or their experiences.
- Questioning: Students may generate only literal questions and may need more modeling in or guidance toward asking inferential or main idea questions.
- Clarifying: Students may initially clarify only difficult, new, or confusing words because students rarely recognize that they are having trouble with an idea in the text.
- Summarizing: Students may miss the main points of a given selection, or they may supply a summary that is too long, too short, or a word-by-word rendition from the text.

To avoid these common problems, I recommend teaching the minilessons at the end of each chapter that focus on a particular strategy that is causing your students difficulty. Also, daily teacher modeling and peer practice help students to catch on to the strategies.

**16. With reciprocal teaching, how can I foster higher order reading skills such as making inferences and evaluating?**

Inferring and other higher order reading skills are already embedded in the reciprocal teaching strategies. For example, when students predict, they engage in making a type of inference. Inferring involves drawing a conclusion by gathering clues or evidence from the text and one's own background knowledge. During questioning, encourage your students to ask inferential and evaluative questions. As your students summarize, ask them to think about the selection's theme or the author's message. When they clarify ideas in a text, your students may link points of confusion in the text with higher order questions that they have about the text's content or the author's intent. As you can see, there are many opportunities to include higher order reading skills during reciprocal teaching lessons.



**Table 2**  
**Reciprocal Teaching in Different Classroom Settings**

Classroom Setting	Why Use Reciprocal Teaching in This Setting?
Whole-class session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To introduce the class to reciprocal teaching strategies</li> <li>• To continually model the four strategies for students in teacher think-alouds</li> <li>• To establish common language and terms</li> <li>• To provide reinforcement in core required reading and content area reading throughout the school day</li> </ul>
Guided reading group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reinforce or introduce reciprocal teaching strategies in a teacher-led, small-group setting</li> <li>• To provide extra support or intervention to students who struggle or to English-language learners</li> <li>• To differentiate instruction based on informal assessments and students' needs</li> <li>• To provide a Response to Intervention</li> </ul>
Literature circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To release responsibility to students for reciprocal teaching strategies</li> <li>• To reinforce and strengthen student use of reciprocal teaching strategies</li> </ul>

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practical ways to overcome such difficulties and information about the four critical foundations necessary for getting the most from reciprocal teaching: scaffolding, thinking aloud, thinking metacognitively, and learning cooperatively. Models for using reciprocal teaching as an RTI plan are outlined with suggestions for using reciprocal teaching during each tier of instruction. Suggestions for incorporating reciprocal teaching into a broader list of comprehension strategies are outlined.

Chapter 2 is loaded with practical ways to introduce reciprocal teaching in your classroom. You might also try a variety of these lessons throughout the year to continue deepening your students' understanding of the strategies. Introductory lesson ideas include sharing the Fab Four using read-alouds and poetry, incorporating characters to represent each strategy, and using hand gestures to cue the strategies. Icons, posters, and bookmarks provide supports for students as they work in pairs and teams to practice the strategies. A discussion of texts and materials to use during reciprocal teaching lessons is provided.

is a multiple-strategy approach that invites students to use all four recommended strategies using cooperative learning, it is a solid and effective option for providing research-based instruction to students in all three tiers of an RTI plan.

When reinforced in all three tiers, students receive the same powerful strategies with varying levels of intensity. In Table 7, you will find an outline of ideas for using reciprocal teaching in each of the tiers, along with assessments to monitor student progress. Following is a detailed description of the RTI tiers of instruction and possible ways to use reciprocal teaching in each.

**Table 7**  
**Reciprocal Teaching as a Response to Intervention (RTI)**

RTI Tiers	Ideas for Using Reciprocal Teaching as an RTI Strategy	Ongoing Assessment Tools
<b>Tier I</b> Excellent quality instruction for all students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to rich and varied reading materials</li> <li>• A variety of groupings for differentiating instruction in whole-class, small-group, and independent structures (e.g., workshop model)</li> <li>• Mix of heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings, flexible groupings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach all four reciprocal teaching strategies together as a multiple-strategy package: predict, question, clarify, summarize.</li> <li>• Use tools to model reciprocal teaching strategies: teacher think-alouds, posters, bookmarks, spinners (resources throughout this book).</li> <li>• Incorporate reciprocal teaching in a variety of grouping formats (whole group, small groups, teacher led) based on need; student-led literature circles or pairs (workshop model, partnerships, independent reading).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administer overall screening device several times per school year (e.g., Fountas &amp; Pinnell, 2007a, 2007b).</li> <li>• Provide frequent informal ongoing assessment for all students (retelling, running records, observations rubric page).</li> <li>• Ask students to give predictions, words or points to clarify, questions, and summaries (record observations).</li> <li>• Administer more frequent assessments for struggling students (1 time per week or more).</li> <li>• Use a Four Door Chart (page 110) for students to record their responses.</li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table 7 (continued)**  
**Reciprocal Teaching as a Response to Intervention (RTI)**

RTI Tiers	Ideas for Using Reciprocal Teaching as an RTI Strategy	Ongoing Assessment Tools
<b>Tier I (continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide targeted instruction through minilessons on predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing.</li> <li>• Use reciprocal teaching with reading materials at instructional and independent reading levels for both fiction and nonfiction.</li> <li>• Incorporate reciprocal teaching in read-alouds, shared reading, small groups, partner reading, and independent reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure quality instruction and fidelity by making sure all lessons are built on the four foundations of reciprocal teaching: modeling and think-alouds, cooperative learning, metacognition, and scaffolding (see online study guide for Reciprocal Teaching Lesson Observation Form).</li> </ul>
<b>Tier II</b> Targeted small-group instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller groups of 3–6 students</li> <li>• Meets daily or several times per week</li> <li>• Taught by classroom teacher or specialist</li> <li>• More frequent assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with target students and provide small-group instruction using all four reciprocal teaching strategies and texts at the group's instructional reading level.</li> <li>• Teach quick minilessons based on student needs and the four strategies: predict, question, clarify, summarize.</li> <li>• Provide extra word work and support in phonics and phonemic awareness after reading texts using the Fab Four.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach students daily during guided reading and record observations (see Chapter 4 for prompts and observations).</li> <li>• Give frequent running records and retelling assessments (once per week).</li> </ul>
<b>Tier III</b> Intensive one-on-one or small-group instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets daily with classroom teacher or reading specialist</li> <li>• One on one or small group of three</li> <li>• Daily assessments/observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more direct instruction in books at the student's instructional level using all four reciprocal teaching strategies.</li> <li>• Continue to provide the specific word work needed based on observations.</li> <li>• Provide minilessons on each of the strategies when needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach each student daily during guided reading using all four strategies and provide prompts.</li> <li>• Give daily running records and retelling assessments.</li> <li>• Provide necessary additional word work to target specific needs.</li> </ul>

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