

Seeing improvement energizes teachers and learners. Think-alouds can show proof positive of student strategy use and progress. This kind of evidence can be used to augment other forms of assessment and replace them to some degree. Having kids keep lists of the strategies they have used, both in general and with particular texts, is a way to keep track of their growth and to remind them what they can do and should do as readers.

The following guidelines will be helpful whenever you engage in a think-aloud with a student. Refer to them as you study a think-aloud transcript, or when you talk it over with a student, or even use these guidelines to ask students to assess themselves. They will provide rich feedback and fodder for both assessment and planning. Obviously you would not use all of these at the same time; you would pick and choose the guidelines that you are helping a student to work on. What I've tried to do here is to cite a full range of strategic knowledge and expertise that think-alouds can help you to assess.

What to Watch For: Questions to Help Assess Reading

Following are some of the reading strategies and behaviors that you can assess with think-alouds:

1. Does the reader understand her purposes for reading a particular text?

- Is the purpose personal?
- Is the purpose socially significant?
- Does the purpose consider a task that the reading can help to complete?
- How can the reading be made more purposeful?

2. Does the reader understand (or attempt to understand) the purposes and goals of the author?

3. Does the reader bring personal background knowledge to bear in understanding the text?

- What are the reader's primary sources of information about the world? about the text?
- How are these sources brought to bear during the reading act?
- How might the use of these information sources be expanded or assisted?

4. How well does the reader bring knowledge forward from one part of the text to another, from one text or activity to another text or activity?

- Can the reader retell, talk back, paraphrase?
- Can the reader make connections between different pieces of information from separate parts of the text to make inferences, see coherent patterns?

5. How well does the reader employ other general processes of reading?

- Does the student have high expectations of print?
- Does the student predict and verify predictions?
- Does the reader ask questions and interrogate text?
- What kinds of questions are asked?
- Are question types varied to kind of text?
- Does the reader ask inference questions? author and me questions? on-my-own or world questions?
- Does the reader ask for help? ask stimulating questions of self and others?
- Does the reader ask questions and make connections that help apply what is read to the real world? that transfer new processes of reading to new texts?
- Does the reader respond emotionally?
- Does the reader visualize settings, situations, characters of story? form mental representations of informational texts?
- Does the student have other sensory experiences, hearing dialogue, etc.?
- Does the reader provide evidence of comprehension monitoring? strategy adjustment?
- Does the reader identify confusion, ask if it “makes sense,” and apply fix-up strategies when needed?
- Is reading speed varied for different situations? Does the student pause or stop and apply fix-up strategies?
- How does the student deal with problems and frustration?
- Are there other strategies that would be helpful to the reader?

6. How independent is the reader with a particular text or kind of text?

- Where is the reader’s ZPD?
- Is the text easy (at the independent level)?

- ___ Is the text too challenging (at the frustrational level) because the reader does not have necessary background, understanding of purpose, knowledge of vocabulary, knowledge of text-type and attendant codes and strategies expected?
- ___ If the text is too challenging, can frontloading of content or strategy use make the text accessible in the ZPD?
- ___ Where are comprehension and engagement faltering?
- ___ At what point in a particular text is instruction and guidance necessary?

7. How well does the student understand global structures of organizing text?

- ___ Does the reader recognize how particular text-types serve different authorial purposes?
- ___ Does the reader recognize particular text-types and how they proceed from beginning to middle to end?
- ___ Does the reader understand and represent the different ways of presenting textual ideas (chronologically, classification, comparison-contrast, description, argument, etc.) and the uses and strengths of each?
- ___ Does the student understand the textual expectations (different codes and conventions, and the strategies for recognizing and interpreting these) of particular text-types?
- ___ Is knowledge of text structure used to improve comprehension?
- ___ Does the student integrate information from various parts of a text?

8. Does the student recognize text as a construction of an author?

- ___ How well does the reader talk back or converse with an author? How often does the reader question, agree, or disagree with an author? Does the student ever talk back to an author?

9. How well does the reader use local-level coherence to make links within sentences or to connect sentences? to link different parts of a text together?

10. How well are inference gaps recognized and inferences made?

11. How often does the reader encounter unfamiliar words?

- ___ What strategies are used to deal with vocabulary challenges?
- ___ What other strategies could be used?

12. How well does the student recognize and use particular codes and conventions?

- ___ What cues are noticed, used, and not used?
- ___ How much and what kind of guidance is needed to help the student use them?

13. How wide a variety of strategies are used with particular texts?

- ___ Poorer readers tend to use only one or two strategies and to use these repeatedly, even when inappropriate. If only a few strategies are used repeatedly, students can use assistance to widen repertoire and to recognize when and how new appropriate strategies may be used. Older poor readers tend to use the same strategies as better readers, but less effectively, appropriately, or flexibly. How can teaching help expand and improve on this?

14. How well does the student learn information from text? learn ways of reading?

- ___ How well is this transferred and applied to new situations?
- ___ How can the teacher help assist transfer?

15. How willing is the student to take risks, go beyond the literal text, hypothesize?

- ___ Too many text-bound comments work against active comprehension and suggest that the teacher should use interventions to foster hypothesizing, predicting, inferring, elaborating, evaluating, and conversing with author.

16. How does the think-aloud reveal unsuspected strengths?

- ___ How can these be celebrated and built upon?

Teacher and Student Check Sheets

Checksheets are highly adaptable—you can use them to evaluate individual readers, see patterns among students, or you can give them to students for use in evaluating themselves and each other. They can also provide great communication with parents about what you are

trying to teach, how well their child is doing, and what they might do at home to help out. You can use examples like the following, design your own around specific strategies you are trying to teach, or work with your students to design ones for classroom use.

As we saw in the previous chapters, you can create check sheets or talkback prompting guides for use with specific types of tasks like inferring, reading for a main idea, or interpreting symbolism. You can also use them for general processes of reading, as we saw in Chapter 2, or to prompt and guide students to attend to the features of particular text types, as we saw in Chapter 6. Below is a variation on a general processes check sheet.

General Processes Check Sheet

Self-Evaluation

not much **sometimes** **often**

1. Used personal background knowledge
2. Made predictions
3. Corrected predictions
4. Asked questions
5. Used images to see
6. Was aware of problems
7. Used fix-ups

As I worked with my young friend Walter throughout one school year, we often used such checksheets. At the beginning of the year he made only very limited use of the general processes of reading. By helping him to access and develop background knowledge through frontloading, and by prompting him to make and correct predictions through think-alouds and talkback guides, Walter gradually grew as a reader. We bridged from correcting predictions to monitoring comprehension and fix-up strategies. But even after a full semester of intensive work, we could see that he did not ask many questions, nor did he seem to visualize what he read.

The check sheet made it obvious to us both that Walter needed more help to visualize what he read. I therefore prompted and guided him through this process with visual protocols and other visualization techniques such as picture mapping and symbolic story representations. These techniques allowed us to “see” what Walter was able to visualize as he read and allowed us to assess and chart his progress and celebrate his considerable improvement.