



We want every student to leave our classroom as an independent reader. Across the school year, we provide detailed instruction, scaffolded support, and consistent encouragement to help students learn and apply reading skills. The true test of teaching arrives as students leave our classrooms for the last time. Are they capable of reading on their own? Can they monitor their progress, noting obstacles and applying fix-it strategies when we are not there to prompt or support them? Have they developed independence to the point where they begin, work through, and successfully complete text and tasks “on their own”? When we are successful in teaching metacognition, the answer to these questions is, “Yes!”

This book describes practical strategies for fostering metacognitive readers in K–5 classrooms. We will explore the research that supports metacognitive teaching practices in the classroom and how you, as the teacher, can build metacognitive strategies for reading into daily routines. We investigate the classroom environments that stimulate students’ metacognition, as well as specific metacognitive teaching tools, including checklists and rubrics.

“ Behind the scenes, metacognition is working—helping students to set goals for reading, monitor their progress along the reading path, address and resolve challenges to understanding, and determine that their reading goals are met. ”

Metacognition and Student Reading



Across the school year, much of our reading instruction focuses on strategies that support students' reading development. These strategies must be taught explicitly so that students become skillful, successful readers in the five components of reading. Often referred to as the "big five," phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension make up the areas of reading students need to develop. Our instruction helps move students from the early focus on oral language to include building phonemic awareness, applying phonics, reading fluently, learning vocabulary, and comprehending text. It is our expectation that, once learned, students will use their increasingly sophisticated knowledge in these areas to read independently.

However, there is more to becoming an independent reader than simply learning the "big five." Metacognition resides at the center of successful reading—without it, students do not know when their reading is going well or getting off track (Kolic-Vehovec, 2002). They cannot determine if they are moving toward their goals for reading, and they may be unable to comprehend text. Indeed, Thiede and de Bruin (2018) note that metacognition "plays an important role in guiding comprehension; comprehension is greater for students who better regulate their reading practices than for those who do not" (p. 125).

In This Chapter

The Path to Reading Independence
Examining Our Own Metacognition
Developing an Inner Guiding Voice
Two Distinct Challenges

The Path to Reading Independence

Metacognition refers to awareness of one’s own knowledge—what one does and doesn’t know—and one’s ability to understand, control, and manipulate one’s cognitive processes. Metacognition is also at the heart of students’ metacognitive practices that support reading independence (Veenman et al., 2006). This independence requires a set of self-regulating behaviors that are complementary to “the big five” because without these behaviors our students will remain dependent on teacher support. Thus, high-quality reading instruction should help students learn these metacognitive behaviors: setting reading goals, monitoring comprehension, identifying and fixing challenges to understanding, and determining that important reading goals are met.

When reading is taught without attention to metacognition, many students remain dependent on their teachers’ feedback to know “how they are doing.” When we provide scaffolded instruction with metacognition, our expectation is that students will gradually assume responsibility and move toward independent reading. As we focus on helping students develop their metacognition, we help them toward the goals of reading independently, and reading successfully.

Metacognition is a key to helping those students identify and overcome those challenges, just as it aids accomplished student readers with their reading endeavors. To further understand the impact metacognition has on reading independence, let’s take a look at the related research.

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Metacognitive Behaviors and Mindsets

