



Skills: Reading

These lessons teach the foundational moves that readers make in order to read with accuracy, engagement, and insight. Since almost all reading requires us to integrate these skills (much the way climbing a stairway requires us to coordinate a number of physical, visual, and cerebral maneuvers), they rarely occur in a specific order, or in isolation from one another. It is helpful, though, to consider these reading moves one by one, in order to become better equipped to give students targeted reading practice that can accelerate growth.

When, how, and what do students read?

Other sections of this guide describe the sorts of activities students do with texts to gain practice in these reading skills and to make measurable progress. These reading activities are varied so that students can enlist all sorts of other interests and capacities—dramatic, artistic, physical, social, and expressive—to enrich their analysis of complex text. Significantly, students are also given regular formative assessments in which they face a complex text cold along with multiple choice questions to find out if they are progressing in terms of their reading comprehension (defined below as the skills of “understanding”). The actual texts that students read have been selected with care because the program assumes that students will spend a significant amount of time and energy reading and rereading these important works. Amplify’s strategy for choosing texts and sequencing them is also described in its own section below.

Categories of reading skills

The program divides the reading skills into three categories: The first category, “the analytic cycle,” includes those skills that students practice and improve on with each increasingly complex text they encounter; the second category, “understanding,” is a relatively simple measure of whether or not students comprehend a given text at particular moments and then, implicitly, in its entirety; and the third, “foundational capacities and habits,” includes the knowledge and habits that students accumulate over time that enhance their ability to tackle complex text—like background knowledge and an understanding of syntax.



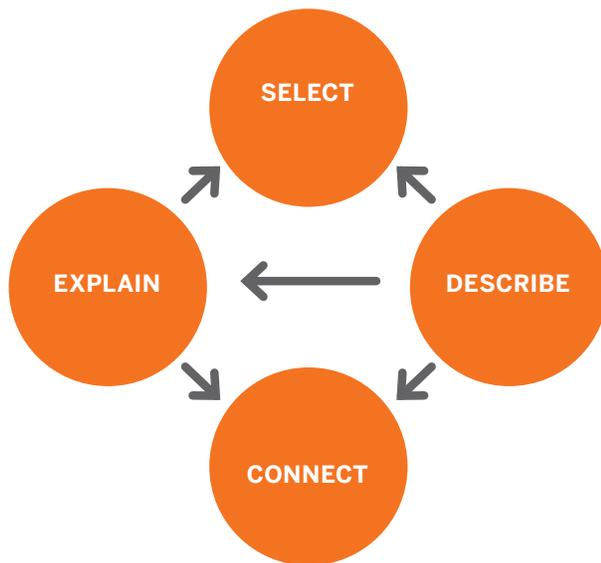
An analytic cycle

A basic cycle of reading instruction in these lessons asks students to:

1. **Select** specific details from the text,
2. **Describe** what they see in those details, and
3. **Explain** what those observations might signify.
4. **Connect** moments in the text to build an idea about what a larger part of the text or, the whole text, means.

At first, the lessons constrain students to *select* and focus on just one moment in the text in order to push their powers of observation in their descriptions and to push their powers of insight in their explanations.

While seemingly counterintuitive, not letting students make connections to other parts of the text actually helps students develop the skills to *describe* and explain to the point at which they can fully develop an idea about the text based on that moment in the text. Amplify's lessons return over and over again in every unit to asking students to describe and explain their ideas based on very close observations of the text so that students make connections across a text and between two or more texts. In this way, they can develop more complex ideas that are truly their own with those fundamental building blocks—and don't have to resort to sterile formulas.





Skills: Reading

Understanding

Amplify's program distinguishes between two levels of understanding or reading comprehension:

Level 1: comprehension of what the text says explicitly

Level 2: a deeper understanding of what the text means implicitly

Amplify calls out “understanding” or comprehension as a skill that is separate from analysis and the associated skills discussed above because students are often able to proceed through the analytic cycle described above with only partial understanding. If students are confident they can keep analyzing the text even while they don't fully understand, then they will be able to continue to work with a text until they do have this understanding. If we make understanding a gating first step, students will be blocked from the very sort of exploration that will enable them to—eventually—understand even the most complex text.

In practice, this means that Amplify's instruction asks students to first analyze the text by noticing discrete elements instead of asking them to summarize it. For example, to focus in on various qualities of the language or on contradictions in the text's presentation of a topic, before asking students to step back and show understanding of the gist of the piece.

While using the students' practice with the analytic cycle to build reading comprehension, the program continuously checks students' level of comprehension by presenting new sections of text along with multiple choice questions. Data from that daily formative assessment helps the teacher know how to support the analytical work in class, know whether or not the students' ability to comprehend independently is progressing, and know whether or not the teacher should provide Amplify's additional supports with fluency practice to accelerate progress.

Foundational knowledge and habits

In order to increase students' ability to apply these key reading skills to complex text, the Amplify program explicitly teaches students the content and habits required in the following areas:

1. **Vocabulary:** Build background knowledge of the world and word
2. **Grammar and sentence mechanics:** Understand, apply, and analyze in text and in speech
3. **Logical structure and rhetoric:** Understand, apply, and analyze in texts and in speech
4. **Fluency:** Read aloud increasingly complex text with expressiveness to show understanding
5. **Reading habits:** Use key tools to persist with complex text



Reading skills and habits as seen in Amplify's lessons: the analytic cycle

Select

Students pick out specific parts of the text—sometimes because these are the details that interest them, sometimes because the teacher has asked them to choose a specific kind. For example:

- In a lesson about Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," students read the scene where the narrator claims to hear the sound of a heart beating from under the floorboards, and they highlight only the actions of the policemen who are interviewing him.
- In a lesson from the unit on *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, students read "The Red-Headed League" and select those details they consider "suspicious."

Describe

Students spell out what they see in the details they've selected and the connections they've identified.

For example:

- In the unit on Roald Dahl's *Boy*, students regularly annotate their nightly reading by marking what grabbed their attention and describing which words and phrases had an impact on them.
- In the lessons on *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, students discuss the language with which Twain shows off Tom's trickiness to figure out whether or not he seems likeable.

Explain

Students unpack the details they've selected and described. For example:

- In a lesson about *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, students draw together the patterns that run through Tom's behavior at different points in the story in order to draw conclusions about his character traits.
- In one of the *A Raisin in the Sun* lessons, students infer what lies unstated beneath the play's last scene, wrestling with why Walter decides to accept the money he had previously refused.

Connect

Students consider how individual details interact with each other, create patterns, and develop themes, either within a larger section of the text or across the entire text.

For example:

- In a lesson about Roald Dahl's *Boy*, students first explore three small parts of a scene in isolation, and then describe the connections they see between those parts to figure out what Dahl is trying to say about who is the source of trouble, adults or kids.
- In a lesson about *A Raisin in the Sun*, students begin by selecting the different things that Walter does in a scene—and then trace out the way those details connect together into a complex attitude toward assimilation.
- In a lesson on *Phineas Gage*, students look back at a moment earlier in the book to figure out what Gage's doctor left unproven among the medical community in order to understand why he digs up Gage's body decades after he died.



Understanding

Students make sense of the text, both explicitly and implicitly.

Level 1: Explicitly

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it. For example:

- Every time a unit introduces a new text, students are first challenged to read that text independently with multiple choice questions that check for comprehension. This way, both teacher and student can tell if the student is becoming a stronger, more independent reader of complex text—or whether he or she needs more practice with some of Amplify’s reading supports, such as fluency practice.
- In one of the lessons on Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart,” students create a digital storyboard to capture exactly the account the narrator gives of how events occurred.
- When reading *Romeo and Juliet*, students try to paraphrase particular phrases from the play in a way that loses none of the specific meaning of Shakespeare’s original language.

Level 2: Implicitly

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. For example:

- At the end of the *Red Scarf Girl* unit, students wrestle with the question: Why do you think Ji-li Jiang wrote *Red Scarf Girl*?
- After closely reading “The Raven,” students watch an animated version of the poem and articulate the ways in which their sense of the poem differed from the one that informs the film.
- Students compare the Gettysburg Address and Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in terms of the texts’ effectiveness in getting the reader to rethink the United States’ commitment to equality.

Foundational knowledge and habits

1. Background knowledge of the world and the word

Students build their knowledge of the world and language by encountering texts that have been carefully curated to expose them to diverse domains of knowledge and relevant academic vocabulary.

- See the vocabulary section that follows to understand better Amplify’s deep and broad approach to developing students’ vocabulary during class time and during independent work. The vocabulary program moves students through embedded vocabulary activities around a small list of academic words from the text they are currently reading, steadily developing a working knowledge of those words.
- In the Brain Science unit, students pull together information from a number of sources to build a working understanding of the key parts of the brain and their functions.
- Close-reading activities often focus on iconic texts or parts of texts, for example: unpacking Juliet’s “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” or Langston Hughes’s “A Dream Deferred.”



2. Grammar and sentence mechanics

Students develop their understanding of how sentences work through the process of close reading and when learning grammar explicitly. For example:

- See the grammar section that follows to understand better Amplify’s deep and broad approach to developing students’ ability to use and understand grammar and sentence mechanics during class time and during independent work.
- In one of the *Boy* lessons, students explore how Dahl uses complex sentence structure to create different kinds of relationships between particular actions.
- During Flex Days, students complete grammar Revision Assignments that ask them to apply what they know about specific grammatical structures to one of their completed pieces of writing.
- During Flex Days, teachers can provide direct instruction with grammar concepts, using lessons from Amplify’s resource, *Mastering Conventions*, and/or direct the students to work on self-guided grammar activities that target key skills needed to strengthen their understanding of syntax and conventions.

3. Logical structure and rhetoric

Students trace the ways that authors coordinate claims, reasons, and evidence within a point and across an essay to build a solid argument. They also explore the range of moves that authors make to build a persuasive argument. For example:

- When working with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, students paraphrase Tom’s speech, compare the impact of their paraphrases to the impact of Twain’s original language, and then search out the rhetorical moves Twain makes to achieve this impact.
- When reading the Declaration of Independence, students notice the way the argument changes as the authors revise each draft.
- When reading *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass, students notice the different devices he uses to get across his argument against slavery and consider the power of his various approaches.

4. Fluency

Students learn to read the text smoothly, with feeling, and with emphasis that helps them express a particular interpretation. For example:

- Students regularly listen to professionally-read audio versions of the reading while following along with the written text.
- In one of the *Red Scarf Girl* lessons, students consider the question of how to read a text with feeling. They critique an especially lifeless reading of *Cinderella*, then try a version of their own.
- Students often “act out” sections of dialogue within texts that are not written as plays, in order to capture different characters’ speech patterns and reveal traits.

5. Reading Habits

Lessons establish the routines by which students utilize these tools to be more effective readers of complex text.

Reread: Students often reread because Amplify has selected texts that reward rereading with new discoveries. But, just in case students miss this opportunity, Amplify’s lessons structure activities that show students how their understanding of the text unfolds over the course of several readings.



Annotate and highlight: Amplify's digital eReader has been built for academic work—enabling students to make the most of their work marking up the text. Notes, highlights, and bookmarks can be coded and searched and, uniquely in Amplify's reader, even show up in the “scrubber” on the side of the screen when the student is searching through pages of text.

Define words from context: Amplify's texts and vocabulary activities challenge students to figure out the meaning of words from the context in which they are used. Only by seeing words in multiple contexts, and noticing how their meaning changes slightly, will students internalize their own meaning of a word. One tool in particular encourages students to define words in context as they read: Amplify's eReader contains a Reveal Tool that highlights the key words students need to understand, but might not know. The number of dots over those words indicate how difficult they are to figure out from context. One dot suggests that the student doesn't have to look far to figure out what that word means—he or she should take some time to try to figure it out for him or herself. Three dots over a word suggest that the student may want to tap on the word and get a contextual definition because the word's meaning may be very difficult if not impossible to figure out from context. Some of these three dot words are also words that might look very familiar to students but are being used in a very unfamiliar way. Lessons in Unit A show students and teachers how to make use of this feature. Tapping on the word brings up a simple contextual substitution for the given word, displayed right above the word, instead of the usual abstract dictionary definition found in most digital eReaders. More on this feature can be found below in the Vocabulary section.

Integrate information from graphic elements such as charts and diagrams: Students work with graphic elements in every unit, often because the texts themselves incorporate visual elements (examples of this include scientific texts like *Phineas Gage, a Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science*, or literary texts like the graphic novel of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* by Gris Grimly). If the text itself does not incorporate visual elements, Amplify has created graphic elements to challenge students to “work visually. Sometimes these are as simple as a table that helps students compare their paraphrase of a line with that of another student. Other times, they are digital apps like the one in which they visually track the characterization of Tom Sawyer in six different scenes, in order to get a graphic representation of how his character changes and stays the same throughout the book. Other times, Amplify has commissioned talented artists to interpret texts, such as in *Romeo and Juliet*, Poetry and Poe, and Liberty and Equality to see how others “work visually” with text—and compare the visual interpretation to students' own readings.



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Paraphrase: It turns out that the simple act of trying to put the text into one's own words, leaving nothing out and adding nothing, is one of the most powerful close reading tools we can offer our students. Amplify incorporates this tool carefully, though, because students can come to really hate it if they don't understand why they are doing it—or how they are supposed to do it correctly (without being sloppy and without plagiarizing). One trick is to make sure students paraphrase sentence by sentence; it makes it possible to compare apples to apples. The most important part of the paraphrase routine takes place when students compare their paraphrases and try to come to consensus about which one is closer to what the author really meant. When students read great stylists like Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, paraphrases also help them consider why the author chose his or her particular words and syntax instead of using what might look like more direct statements in the students' paraphrases.