

What To Do When You Don't Understand

Reading Strategies

- Slow down until you find an appropriate speed for full comprehension.
- Re-read when comprehension fails or when the material becomes difficult.
- Consult an outside source (dictionary, expert) or another source in the text (glossary, index, table of contents, graphs, illustrations).
- Make a written record of a pending question.
- Quit reading and think about what you've read.
- Check for hidden assumptions.
- Translate (use your own words) unclear, abstract, or unfamiliar words and/or relationships into familiar terms.
- Clarify the purpose for reading (determine rate).
- Identify the aspects of your reading that are important vs. those that are trivial.
- Focus your attention on the important information.
- Review and question yourself to determine if your goals (purposes) were achieved.
- Recover from distractions and disruptions: identify what is interfering and recover.
- Search both internal and external sources for information, including previous knowledge.

Reasoning and Problem-Solving Strategies

- Make a visual representation of the ideas or relationships (graph, chart, table, diagram, model, figure, drawing.)
- Make a mathematical representation: translate words into symbols.
- Write an open sentence (relationship sentence).
- Vocalize thoughts (think out loud) to construct accurate explanation.
- Work backwards.
- Change your point of view (manipulate alternatives).
- Classify and sort things into meaningful groups.
- Account for all possibilities.
- Identify what is worked, given, needed.
- Simplify the problem, break complex into smaller parts, identify sub goals, solve each part to reach the whole.
- Begin with what you know, draw on other information, proceed through a chain of steps.
- Look for a pattern, gather changes into continuous sequence, construct a constant rule, apply rule to determine next step.
- Determine or develop a set of criteria the answer must fit.
- Generate hypothesis (alternative solutions), search for evidence, (to support the hypothesis), test hypothesis (weigh the evidence-test for validity), evaluate hypothesis (is it reasonable?), confirm or reject hypothesis.
- Create an alternative text: use your own words.
- Use previous knowledge.

Qualities That Can Help You Overcome Perceptual Blocks

- **Perseverance:** Work persistently through obstacles, follow through with reasoning process, don't guess.
- **Motivation:** Be willing to spend more time and effort. Concentrate on the less-well-mastered segments of information.
- **Self Confidence:** See yourself as competent, use self-coaching techniques.