

Highlighting

Students are frequently asked to highlight (or underline) while they read. The result sometimes is a mass of highlighting text with no real differentiation, almost every sentence is selected. Highlighting is a strategy that assists students in identifying main ideas or key concepts along with supporting details. The goal is to help students target and condense information, improving their reading comprehension. Highlighting provides an active reading strategy that helps focus the reader to identify key concepts or topics and their supporting ideas. The strategy limits the amount of text that students must attend to in order to understand the basic idea in a block of text. Highlighting can also be an efficient tool for reviewing text. This strategy is also highly versatile and can be modified to fit specific instructional goals.

Pugalee (2005) suggests that highlighting should be used in conjunction with other strategies that support students in reviewing and understanding the ideas presented in the text. Highlighting works well with other strategies that support student comprehension and processing of the information in the text. Highlighting can also lead to writing and summarizing as part of the strategy.

How to implement the strategy:

1. Select a text or block of text that contains one or more key ideas. (Note: If the text selection is large, divide it into several smaller blocks.)
2. Identify the focus of the highlighting such as the main idea(s), key words and supporting ideas, definitions, or concepts and examples.
3. Tell the students you are going to model for them a strategy that will help them process the information in a text selection and pare it down into a smaller, more manageable amount of text that “highlights” the main idea(s), key words and supporting details, etc.

Note: While Pugalee (2005) suggests that highlighting with the whole class may be less effective than working with a small group, he asserts it can still be a valuable alternative. Teachers should “read the class” to ensure they are following along. In addition, teachers should ensure students understand the purpose of the strategy and think about how it can support their own processing of text and learning the concepts presented in the text.

4. Provide each student with a copy of the text and have them read the appropriate portion.
5. Project an image of the document so all the students can see the text.
6. Make your thinking visible to the students by using “self talk” to process information in the text that aligns with the focus you selected for the passage.
7. Model for the students how to “highlight” the key information by highlighting the one word or brief phrase that aligns with the focus.

8. Have students turn to a peer to discuss what was highlighted and why it was highlighted.
9. Continue to model the “thinking” and “highlighting” for the students to assist them in developing their understanding of the purpose and usefulness of “highlighting” to pare down information.
10. Review the highlighted material and summarize, orally or in writing, the information using the key words and phrases that you lighted.
11. Engage students in dialogue about what they noticed while you modeled the strategy.
12. Emphasize to the students that “highlighting” helped you focus on the major ideas or key vocabulary or concepts and supporting evidence by comparing the amount of text highlighted with the amount not highlighted.
13. Provide time for the students to practice the strategy with the next section of the text another peer or small group.
14. Provide multiple opportunities for the students to practice the strategy throughout the year.

Variations:

- **Multiple Colors:** Students use different colors to highlight different components. =
 - Yellow: Main Idea
 - Pink: Supporting Details
 - Green: Vocabulary Words or Definitions
 - Blue: Examples
- **Teacher/Student Interactions:** Teachers identify key concepts that will be encountered in the text and students use different colors to highlight important information for each concept that is within the text.
- **Definition Search:** Texts often have just the key vocabulary words highlighted in bold typeface. Have students search for and highlight the definition for the vocabulary words.

Extensions:

- **Sticky-Note Summaries:** Students use the words and key ideas they highlighted to compose a brief summary of the information on a sticky note.

Additional Resources:

- Pugalee, David K. (2007). *Developing mathematical and scientific literacy: Effective content reading practices*. Norwood, MA. Christopher-Gordon.