

Skills in reading comprehension

(“fourfold matrix”)



In this animation, we'll be describing the skills in reading comprehension that a multilingual student, Hardi, has. Hardi has been studying in a mainstream classroom for two years after completing the preparatory instruction and is now in seventh grade. The different descriptors of skill on the fourfold matrix describe Hardi according to,

- how independently Hardi functions in different reading settings and to what extent he needs the guidance of teachers and classmates and
- In what kinds of situations Hardi can understand what he's read. Concrete things are often familiar and connected to everyday life, whereas abstract themes include for instance the contents of different subject matters.

The skill descriptors depict different branches of skills in reading comprehension. It's important to make them concrete, because it's a totally different thing to be able to read everyday texts about familiar themes than it is to read textbook materials on abstract themes. Our goal is to give tools to understand what kinds of skills your students possess and what kind of support they might need from you as their teacher.

These skill descriptors show proficiency on a general level and as a teacher, you don't always know the students well enough to be doing this kind of an analysis. That's not something to stress over, though. We suggest that you think about what areas of language proficiency feel the most relevant with a student or group of yours. Then you can focus on observing their actions and need for support in relation to those skills.

It's visible in the matrix of Hardi's reading proficiency that the descriptors are placed in different blocks and he functions quite independently in many subskills. Strong support in his reading is still needed, though.

Moving on, let's take a closer look at the skill profile. We'll start off with the functions that Hardi is able to handle independently.



- From concrete, familiar topics, Hardi understands **the core contents**: from factual texts, the facts, from an argumentative text, the opinion and its reasoning and from narrative texts, the main order of events. He also has an understanding of which **text type** he's dealing with and why and to whom the text is written and oriented. In addition, Hardi gets the main points out of motivating texts if the topic is familiar, even from the more challenging ones. He has the ability to read more holistically in these situations and to put what he's read into perspective with his own thoughts.
- If a text is abstract and challenging, Hardi cannot, when asked, explain the reading with his own words, but has to **repeat** the contents as they are. So, he often finds the right spot in the text but, doesn't necessarily understand what is said. This could be caused by him resorting to a linear style of reading for the most part, meaning that he reads texts word-by-word. Other reasons obviously might include the unfamiliarity or difficulty of the text all in all. The problem with reading **linearly** is that it's slow and heavy and the reader might not remember, when at the end of the sentence, what was said in the beginning. The process also makes it impossible to obtain an understanding of the whole or to distinguish between main points and details or to activate one's own thinking.
- When Hardi is reading about abstract topics, he understands different detached details, but seeing the whole and relations between things proves challenging. Hardi is able to make use of visual elements, photos and graphics, to support his comprehension but, the teacher's support in interpreting them is still needed. Especially the more difficult texts have Hardi unable to deduce or anticipate meanings. It's also challenging for him to **engage with the texts** or to evaluate the contents critically. **The utilization of the content** and applying it to his own thinking, speech or writing is challenging if the text is abstract.
- As it is with any language user, **understanding a text's function** is tied in with the context. Naturally, Hardi faces new and unfamiliar situations more often than the average **Finn** just because he hasn't lived **in Finland** that long. For example, a roadside election ad, a new schedule at the turn of a school period or a headline in the newspaper all require different kinds of understanding of the larger **context** and the current **situation**: the Finnish political system and its upcoming election, the periodic system of time management in education – or the sales tactics of tabloids and the timely public scandals. The interpretation of even the simplest texts is hard if the context, the situation and the function of the text in them is not familiar. On the other hand, even the most abstract text becomes comprehensible if the context is familiar and interesting (such as the commentary on a football game might be to Hardi).
- And as the last thing, understanding attitudes and tones and relationships between things are hard to achieve and require support from the teacher and friends.



To sum up,

It can be said that Hardi needs quite a bit of guidance in being able to develop his study skills and to utilize all his resources. He needs to be taught reading strategies so that he could vary the method of reading according to the goal of the reading and to find the needed information out of the text. Many learn these things automatically by themselves, but most students profit from them being taught explicitly and clearly. Hardi reads particularly the harder texts technically and mechanically and thus avoids deduction, anticipation, engaging with the text and critically evaluating the text.

Descriptors on the matrix:

- Understands situation and context
- Understands text type and goal (function)
- Understands core contents (e.g., facts, opinions, narratives)
- Understands various detached details
- Understands relations between things
- Understands attitudes and tones (e.g., critique, humor, dismissal)
- Repeats the contents as they are
- Anticipates where the text might lead him
- Actively deduces meanings

