

Secrets of Effective Readers

Imagine walking into a new house or apartment. You enter your bedroom, ready to put away your clothes. But you have no closet, no hangers! Furthermore, you have no dresser! No shelves! Nowhere to put your clothes! How can you organize your room? How can you ever find things if your clothes stay unpacked in boxes, or scattered around the floor in random piles? It's a big mess!



Your brain is like that room. When you learn new information—or read something new—your brain wants to file it with similar information. It wants to “wake up” the knowledge it already has about that topic, and connect the new learning to what you already know. That way, it can organize it, remember it, and retrieve it!

Before opening that book or looking at that informational web site, a successful reader prepares his or her mind to receive the new information. You may not always “see” how an effective reader does this—or be aware that you are doing this yourself. But practicing pre-reading skills can make a big difference in how well you learn.

1. Set a purpose for reading.

To prepare your brain for the new information, know WHY you are reading. What do I hope to learn? Do I need to find out something? Am I curious about this topic? Do I need to know this for a test?

2. “Wake up” or activate prior knowledge.

How does this connect to what I already know about this subject? Thinking about what I already know will help me understand and remember more of what I read.

3. Notice text features.

As I look over the text, what illustrations, captions, and headings do I notice? What words are bolded, and do I know what they mean?

4. Ask questions.

I wonder what the title means? What is this text about? What will I learn?

