60 Content Reading Strategies & Activities

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Background knowledge

1. **Carousel graffiti**. Groups of students respond to content-related question prompts introducing a topic on stations around the room in a sequential manner.
2. **Word splash**. Key content-related word is written on board for students to spontaneously add words/phrases associated with the topic.
3. **"Write 5 words when you think of**. . .". Students individually or in small groups respond to teacher generated content topic word(s).
4. **Focused dialogue**. Triad discussions about a topic or topic-related prewritten questions on index cards as a means of introducing a unit. In groups of three, each student is given a series of different questions. Other group members respond when it is their turn; then the member who posed the question responds. Each member of the group takes a turn posing a series of 9-12 questions.
5. **KWL Chart**. On paper with three columns marked 'Know' 'Would like to know' and 'Learned' (this last column to be used later), students in groups write down what they know and would like to know about a topic.

Summary

6. **ABC Summarizing.** List letters of the alphabet vertically and ask students to write a word, phrase of sentence beginning with that letter of the word that is related to the topic.
7. **Luck of the draw fishbowl.** Place students' names in a container and pick two or three names at the end of class. The students whose names are chosen prepare a brief summary of specific information recently learned for the next class meeting.

8. **Learning log.** Students react regularly in journal form to question prompts based on what they have read.

9. **3-2-1.** Have students individually or in groups write three things they consider important to remember from what they have read; two things they will find out more about; and one thing they will do a project on.

10. **Best test.** Students create their own test based on the information they have learned.

11. **Ticket to leave.** Have students provide a brief written summary of what they have read just prior to the end of the lesson.

12. **Last word acronym.** Use the letters of a key topic word as the basis for creating words, phrases, or sentences about a topic.

13. **Backwards cloze.** From a paragraph written on the board summarizing a topic, erase one word at a time and have students 'read' the paragraph each time, inserting the missing words along with the words still left on the board.

14. **Sentence modifying adverbs.** Produce a list of commonly used sentence-modifying adverbs on the board, such as 'suddenly', 'actually', 'unfortunately', etc., and ask students to produce content statements they are studying in class.

15. **Index card test preparation.** Have students individually prepare and use information for a test from their reading on an index card which can be used when taking the test. They can write as much information they wish on both sides of the card. Collect along with completed tests to analyze their learning.

Language Structure

16. **Transition signal definitions.** Refer students regularly to transition signals defined (see handout) for use in reading and writing.

17. **Transition signal cloze.** Rewrite a paragraph with several transition words and erase them to be used as a cloze activity. Show how the signals add to and enhance sentence/paragraph meaning

18. **Pronoun search.** Check for and make students aware of pronouns as they are reading.
19. **Grammar word labeling.** Teach the labels 'noun', 'verb', 'adjective', 'preposition', 'conjunction', etc. Periodically review them and teach derivative forms of nouns and verbs.
20. **Sentence highlighting.** Periodically highlight a sentence and analyze it for complexity in the following manner:
    a. Find the verb(s): "What's the action?"Beware of verbs that act as nouns.
    b. Find the subject: "What is this sentence about?"
    c. Break the sentence down into shorter sentences by getting rid of conjunctions or subordinators.
    d. Ask *who, what, where, when, how,* etc. questions.
    e. Underline unfamiliar words.
    f. If there are pronouns, make sure students know what each stands for.
    g. Look for transition words to connect ideas.
    h. Have students reread the sentence or talk it over with someone else.
21. **Sentence collecting.** Periodically ask students to find a sentence in a passage which contains a specific grammatical feature (transition word, complex sentence, etc.)
22. **Typographical enhancement.** Copy or adapt part of a familiar text and enhance a targeted aspect of language by capitalizing, underlining, color coding, or bolding that feature. Have students read aloud and/or create new sentences with that feature.
23. **Dictogloss.** Choose or create a content sentence for dictation to be used as review. Read it aloud **once only**, with students listening only. Then have them reconstruct the sentence, first individually, then in small groups. Repeat the same sentence as many times as necessary until students in groups recreate the sentence accurately.
24. **Moving dictation.** In pairs, students take turns going to a centrally located place(s) in the room where there is/are a posted series of

numbered sentences containing a review of a unit topic. Partner A walks to the posted sentences, reads and attempts to remember sentence 1, and walks back to 'dictate' that sentence to partner B. Partner B does the same thing with sentence 2, etc. Partner A and B continue to alternate, thus dictating to each other the series of posted sentences.

Vocabulary

25. **Pronounce/analyze/define.** With key words or words from the Academic Word List (AWL) as they appear in content reading, take the time to focus on the words by having students pronounce it several times, analyzing the word for its affixes and grammar forms, and denotative and connotative meanings.

26. **24/48/7/14 interval review.** When teaching a vocabulary word, be sure to review it 24 hours after introducing it; two days after; one week later; and two weeks later.

27. **Word wall.** List vocabulary in categories on a word wall in class on on large pieces of paper for periodic reference, review, and use in writing.

28. **Word categories.** Periodically place content-specific words in categories to demonstrate their relationship to each other.

29. **Word sorting.** Dictate words to be reviewed and ask students, individually or in groups, to place the words in appropriate categories.

30. **Missing words.** Select a paragraph from a text and delete selected words. Number the blanks and ask students, in groups, to write in the correct words.

31. **Word/definition matching.** In groups, have students match words from the reading with their definitions on separate cards.

32. **Two step recycling.** Make a set of cards/slips of paper with one/two sentences from the text with a designated word missing. In groups have students find the missing word(s) from the text.

33. **Categorizing.** Have students draw two or three columns on a sheet of paper. Give them a category from the lesson or unit. Dictate a series of words that can fit into one of the categories.

34. **Customizing the text.** From a passage you propose to use with your class, select a dozen or so words. Write these down. Then select a sheet of 30-40 different words (not only synonyms) from which alternatives to those in the text can be chosen. Give the students the reading passage. Slowly say the words you have originally chosen while students underline them in the passage. Give out the sheet of the 30 – 40 words. Ask students to select substitutes from the sheet for the words underlined in the text. In pairs, have students look at and discuss each other's choices.

35. **Erasing words.** Write on the board about 10 words that are difficult to spell and give the class a minute to 'photograph' them in their minds. Point to and read aloud each word, then erase it. Have students try to write down the list of words from memory as each word has been erased.

36. **Spaghetti technique.** Point out and collect collocations from content texts as students encounter them in their reading. Periodically use 10 or so pairings and arrange them one-by-one randomly in a circle. Have student draw lines connecting the original collocations.

37. **Recalling words.** Write on the board between 15-20 words the students have recently learned. Make sure all the words are understood. Give students a minute to examine them, then erase or conceal them. Individually or in pairs/small groups, have students try to recall and write down as many as they can.

38. **Predicted meanings.** Write 8-10 unfamiliar words on the board from a text to be read. Have students take a sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. Students write the words down on the left hand column. On the right column have students write down 3-4 words suggested by each word. Then have students, in groups of 3-4, compare what they have written. Then refer students to the text where the original words are located.

39. **Writing definitions.** Review what students have been studying. Select up to 20 words you wish them to remember. On this list be sure to select five words each from different parts of speech or all 20 from the

same part of speech. Ask them to write definitions for each word but not to mention the word they are defining. They should be analytical definitions, not simply synonyms. Have groups exchange definitions and guess each other's words.

40. **Making groups.** Select a lexical category for review and ask students to call out the words they know related to the category. Have two students write the words on the board. Ask the students to think of as many ways to subgroup the words.

41. **Vocabulary notebook.** Have students write down unfamiliar words from a content unit. Encourage them to write meanings, parts of speech, and sentence context.

42. **Ghost definitions.** Choose a text and underline 8-10 words and phrases in it. At the bottom of the page, write definitions of these words in random order, together with definitions of 2-4 other words not in the text. Make a copy for each student in the class. Explain how you prepared the definitions. Ask the students to match the definitions to the underlined words, then to find the words to suit the remaining definitions. Ask students to look at the work of two or three other students in the class.

43. **A to Z vocabulary.** Periodically assign each student a letter from the alphabet. Tell each to find two words that begin with their assigned letter and related to the content being taught. They must then copy the sentences in which the words occur and write two original sentences using the words in their correct context. Bring students together in groups of four, selectively or at random. Have them exchange words and definitions and have each student use at least four of the words from their exchanges in a paragraph.

44. **Rivet.** Select 8-10 words. Write numbers and draw blank lines on the board for each letter of a word that is chosen. Fill in the letters of each word one at a time as students watch. Encourage them to guess what the word is as it is beginning to be completed.

45. **Memory association.** Have students take turns to try to name all the words they know in a category. Anyone who cannot think of a word immediately drops out.
46. **Find the page.** Dictate a series of content words the students have recently learned. They then look through the dictionary to find the page number where each word appears.
47. **Semantic feature analysis.** Design a grid with featured vocabulary according to content or word category on the vertical axis and according to features/characteristics on the horizontal axis. Have students mark a √, -, or a ? to determine if the category/feature is possible, not possible, or questionable under certain conditions.

Comprehension
48. **Sticky notes**. With sticky (post it) notes, have students write down "I wonder if. . ." or "This reminds me of. . ." prompts to demonstrate possible questions or thoughts which could emerge from the text as it connect with personal knowledge.
49. **Reverse text sequencing**. Before automatically assignin g a reading passage or chapter, do selected applications/activities of the text topic in class; discuss the material with students by introducing and expanding vocabulary items; assign selected questions for students to answer by skimming the text; and then have student read the text.
50. **Text skimming**. In order to have students understand a passage or chapter, ask them to read the first sentence or paragraph carefully; look at the beginning of each paragraph; read a few words; skip some paragraphs;' read the last paragraph carefully; look back for clarification, if necessary.
51. **Reconstructed jumbled text**. Cut an excerpt from the text into paragraphs or sentences. Have students reconstruct the text in the correct order and explain why they have chosen that order.
52. **GIST**. With difficult texts, place on a screen for the entire class to view in detail. For each paragraph or section, help students underline ten or more words or concepts that are considered most important for

understanding the text. List the words on the board and together write a summary statement or two with those words. Repeat for each paragraph.

53. **Boiling it down**. This activity requires different size sticky notes. Ask students to provide a summary of a reading on the largest size of the skicky note. With the next largest size, ask students to provide another summary of the summary. Continue in this manner with each small size sticky note, making sure students write with the same size lettering.

54. **Precis**. With a reading passage sum up each paragraph in one sentence; sum up the sentences into one sentence; and sum up the sentence into one word.

55. **Content review**. Type a sheet with at least 50 content vocabulary words in pre-measured blanks on multiple sheets of paper. Include enough function words to make sentences, In addition have a handful of blanks wit nothing written on them. Cut the sheet into individual piece and place them into separate bags to distribute to groups of students. Ask students to make five complete sentences as review of content with the separate words.

56. **Tarzan/Jane summary**. In a text with multiple paragraphs, number each and have available sticky notes. With each sticky note numbered for each paragraph, have students provide a very short, few word summary for each paragraph. Have students then gather the sticky notes together and arrange sequentially (they are numbered). In groups, have students provide expanded oral and written summary for each paragraph.

57. **Anticipation guide**. Create a pre- and post- reading series of sentences, some factual, some untrue, based on what the students will read. Students answer True or False for each statement during the pre-reading; they them review the sentences after the reading to determine if their initial guesses were correct.

Fluency

58. **Phrasing markers.** Mark phrases in a text with slant lines. Have students practice reading the text aloud then silently according to the phrasing

markers.

59. **Timed individual reading.** Time students individually as they read a passage, asking them to mark exactly where they stop in the passage after a one minute interval, two minute interval, three, etc.

60. **Timed pair reading.** Partner students and have each take turns reading the same passage aloud to each other for one minute. Each in turn marks where he/she stops. They repeat the same reading three times, each taking turns (each time they read they will cover more words in their reading).