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Fostering Content Reading Skills
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The DCDD Board members prepare briefs about topics of interest for our members. As a DCDD member, you are receiving this brief on the topic of resources for professionals who work with students who have communication disorders and/or who are deaf or hard of hearing. We appreciate your continued membership with DCDD! Please feel free to discuss this article on DCDD [Linkedin](#) or [Twitter](#).

What is content area reading?

Content area reading skills are those skills that help support reading comprehension and the understanding of content in areas such as mathematics, science, and social studies (Howell & Luckner, 2003; Shanahan, 2012). Content area reading is often associated with advanced literacy, which is an important component of success both in and out of the classroom setting (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O'Neal, & Cusenbary, 2000, Vacca & Vacca, 2010).

What are considered content area texts?

Text books (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies, etc.)
Articles/Magazines (e.g., Weekly Reader; Ranger Rick; National Geographic Kids, etc.)

Why should you care about content area reading as a parent or educator of children who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Research has indicated that many students who are deaf or hard of hearing struggle with reading comprehension with only 5% of high school seniors demonstrating literacy achievement rates at or above those of their hearing counterparts (Kelly & Barac-Cikoja, 2007), and over half struggling to develop reading comprehension levels commensurate with those of a typical 4th grader (Easterbrooks & Beal-Alvarez, 2012; Traxler, 2000). Helping students develop advanced literacy skills, such as content area reading skills, may help in closing this achievement gap.

What can you do as a parent or educator of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing?

1. Before reading a content area text, help to **activate background knowledge** by asking a question such as, "Where have you seen this before?" or "Do you remember when … ?"

2. Before reading and during reading, help **build on background knowledge** by clearing up any misconceptions and make connections to content discussed in the text and how that content relates to the world around them. This can be accomplished through discussion or by having an experience (e.g. field trip, science experiment, hands-on learning, etc.).

3. Before reading and during reading, identify and discuss any vocabulary specifically related to the content (content-specific vocabulary), especially words in boldface type. Make sure these words are understood within the context of the content you are reading. It may also be beneficial to identify any multiple meanings that may be encountered when reading texts in other genres or subject areas.

4. Before reading, identify the structure of the text (cause/effect; problem solution; sequential; compare/contrast; etc) and make that structure explicit. For example, in a text structured as cause/effect, identify and explain which portion(s) of the text identifies the causes and identify and explain which portion(s) of the text identifies the effects. You may rely on headings and other text features (see below) when doing this.

5. Before reading and during reading, point out and elaborate on text features (images, headings, maps, charts, graphs, etc.)

6. Try to find some time to read content-area and/or non-fiction texts each day!

Resources:

[Additional Strategies for Activating and Building Background Knowledge](#)

[Additional Strategies for Content-Specific Vocabulary Development](#)

[Resource for Identifying Text Features](#)

[Links to Content Area and Non-Fiction Texts at All Grade Levels! (free sign up required for some)](#)

References

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