

Establish a Purpose

(Source: Reader's Handbook, Great Source Education Group, Inc. 2002)

Before starting any reading, it is important to establish a purpose.

Why are you reading? Is it to find a number in the phone book or the time for a movie? Maybe it's to find the main idea of a short story or to chart the development of a character throughout a novel. In any case the purpose is what you, as the reader, hope to accomplish by the end of the reading. Without a purpose, you can easily lose your train of thought and get to the end of a reading without ever knowing what you've even read. Remember, it's a matter of not working harder but of working smarter. Knowing your purpose for reading allows you to find the answer your looking for with the minimum amount of muss and fuss.

What teachers need to know...

There are four basic reasons an author chooses to write something:

1. to inform or explain
2. to entertain
3. to persuade
4. to enlighten or reveal an important truth

Sometimes there is more than one purpose for the writing. Usually, however, the author has one important purpose in mind when writing. Recognizing the purpose of the writing and helping students understand this purpose is a vital first step in preparing students for reading any text.

What teachers can do...

Teachers can help students establish a purpose for various reading tasks by asking the following:

Types of Reading	Possible Questions & Responses
Content Area Textbooks	<i>Using the title of the chapter we are reading, what is one question you might ask?</i> Example: Title of the chapter – Population <i>What is population, and why is it important?</i>
Essays	<i>What is the subject of the reading?</i> <i>What is the author saying about the subject?</i> <i>How do I feel about the author's message?</i>
Biographies or Autobiographies	<i>What kind of life did this person lead?</i> <i>How do I feel about this person?</i> <i>How did others feel about this person?</i> <i>What was this person like?</i>
Novels and/or Read Alouds	<i>Who is telling the story?</i> <i>Who are the main characters, and what are they like?</i> <i>What is the main problem in the story?</i> <i>Where and when does this story take place?</i> <i>How does the author express his or her message?</i>
Tests	<i>What is the question asking?</i> <i>What information is needed in order to answer the question?</i>