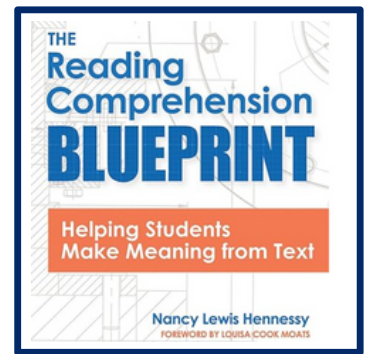


# Instructional Tips

This month's Instructional Tip is compliments of Nancy Hennessey and her new book, *The Reading Comprehension Blueprint*.

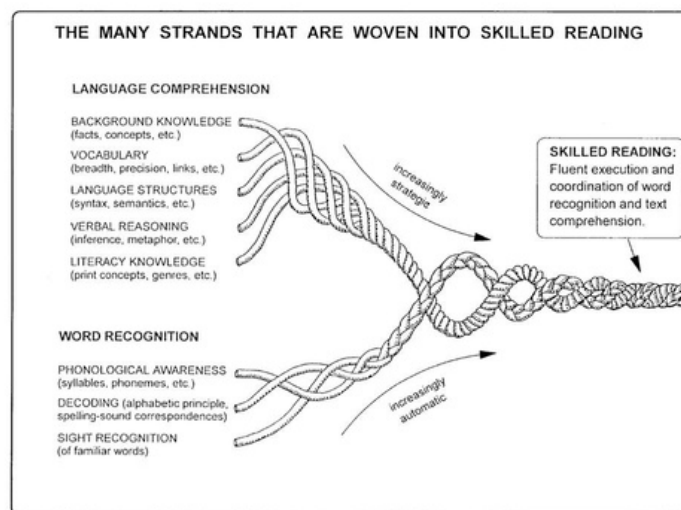


## A Critical Contributor to Comprehension: Syntax & Sentence Comprehension

*"The sentence lies at the heart of communicating thought and meaning, whether you are the writer or the reader. The rules of our language, syntax and grammar, allow for the creation of an infinite number of sentences that serve as the 'worker bees of text'."*

Scott, 2004, p. 340

In an earlier article for this newsletter, we noted that multiple sources of knowledge & skills are necessary to making meaning of text and we focused on the contribution of vocabulary. The language comprehension strands of the Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001) also indicate that language structures, including semantics & syntax, are critical to constructing meaning.



We know that when skilled readers come to text, they recognize and retrieve the meaning of individual words and “work out the syntactic structure and sense of the sentence (Cain & Oakhill, 2007, p. xii).” Syntax, the internal order of the sentence is a vehicle for conveying the precise meanings of the words, phrases, clauses and their relationships within the sentence (semantics). It provides the structure for organizing the ideas within a sentence and explicitly conveys which words or groups of words answer basic comprehension questions such as who did what to whom, when, where, how...? (Poulsen & Gravgarrd, 2016).

The informed educator recognizes that these questions are the bridge to understanding the role of the building blocks of the sentence (words, phrases, and clauses) in conveying meaning. They know that it is not sufficient to solely understand each of these as grammatical categories, but more importantly, their function in the sentence. For example, it is traditional to teach the labels & definition for the parts of speech, e.g. a noun is the name of a person, place or thing. However, sentence comprehension requires an understanding of their jobs in the sentence, that is, knowing which questions they answer.

# Instructional Tips

Knowledge of their function needs to be explicitly taught & practiced within the context of sentences from the read-aloud to more advanced texts. For example, the reader needs to understand the following:

Parts of Speech	Their Jobs: Answer the questions.....
Noun	Who or what?
Verb	Doing or did?
Adjective	Which one, what kind, how many?
Adverb	Where, when, how, & why?

Hennessy & Salamone, 2024

Similarly, noun, verb, adjectival & adverbial phrases also answer these questions. When students have been taught & acquired this knowledge, it can support parsing/understanding sentences that may be challenging for them. Consider this sentence from the short story, *The Jacket*, (Soto, 1986) a 5th -6th grade text & how these questions can support understanding.

*"The next day when I got home from school, I discovered draped on my bedpost a jacket the color of day-old guacamole."*

Who is the sentence about?	Gary Soto (I)
What did he do?	discovered
What did he discover?	a jacket
Where was the jacket?	draped on his bedpost
When did he discover it?	the next day when he got home from school
Which jacket?	the color of day-old guacamole

Hennessy & Salamone, 2024

It is important to acknowledge that the role of syntax & sentence comprehension is often overlooked in reading comprehension curricula & such instruction supports proficient reading. Don't forget that these worker bees "one by one communicate the ideas that eventually add up to "gist of the text" (Scott, 2004).



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# HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

We are THRILLED to announce our summer book study of *The Reading Comprehension Blueprint*, in partnership with The Reading League NC! Nancy Hennessy will be joining us for our kickoff session and help us close out the book study in September. This summer, let's take a deep dive into comprehension instruction together!

Take advantage of our discount code RBCNC24 for 10% off through Brookes Publishing. Register now to save your seat for what will be fantastic learning as we come together to deepen our thinking of this complex work. Register here: <https://bit.ly/RCBsummer2024>.

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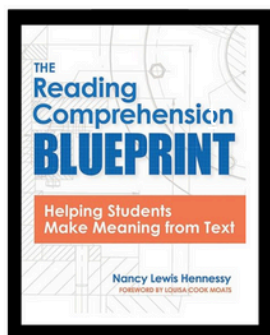
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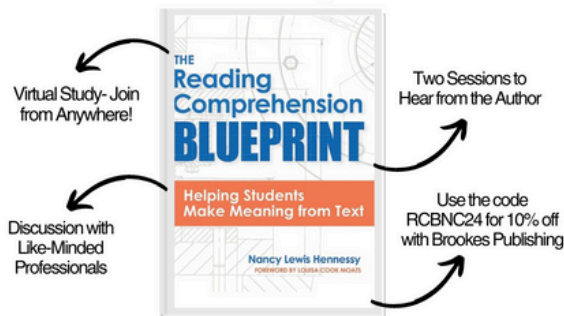
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