



# Content-Area Reading, Distilled\*

*\*Distilled (di-stild') adj. 4. Separated or extracted essence*

<b>Why content-area reading is critical ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It involves authentic research, authentic reading.</li><li>• It mirrors the kinds of reading historians, scientists, designers, economists, and other content career people do.</li><li>• It is an opportunity to organize information, draw necessary conclusions, and use those conclusions to make decisions.</li><li>• It builds vocabulary in a natural, realistic, meaningful way.</li><li>• It promotes curiosity and life-long learning.</li><li>• It provides opportunities to write purposefully in real-life, authentic contexts.</li></ul>
<b>What content area reading instruction <i>IS</i> ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using texts that are engaging, meaningful, authentic, current, and in many cases interdisciplinary, so students are able to make cross-curricular connections</li><li>• Providing students a variety of sources and voices on a topic, guiding them to construct their own understanding of the information</li><li>• Meeting all learners where they are, and helping them move forward, using text</li><li>• Maintaining high expectations</li><li>• Modeling aloud the thinking processes that good readers use</li><li>• Providing explicit instruction on what effective readers do before, during, and after reading</li><li>• Using graphic organizers that are developed to match the structure of the text assigned</li><li>• Assigning tasks that check for understanding rather than merely recall</li><li>• Using texts of varying genres and lengths in order to explore and extend understanding of a topic or theme</li><li>• Using the kinds of informational, expository, persuasive texts that adults really read (essays, newspaper articles, primary sources, journals, reviews, commentaries, opinion pieces, technical writing, etc.)</li><li>• Asking students to collaborate in not only the reading of texts, but also the thinking, the discussing, the writing about texts</li><li>• Provoking student inquiry by valuing and pursuing open-ended questions</li><li>• Providing opportunities for students to engage with the content <b>before, during, and after</b> reading</li></ul>
<b>What it is <i>NOT</i> ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using a one-size-fits-all assignment</li><li>• Assigning “comprehension” questions at the end of the chapter</li><li>• Asking students to read silently by themselves</li><li>• Expecting students to read on their own, then complete tasks at the end of the reading</li><li>• Focusing on “right” answers about the text</li><li>• Having the teacher or fellow students read the text aloud for the class, while the class listens silently</li><li>• Just reading textbooks in any given subject area</li></ul>

<b>Best practices for content-area reading ...</b>
<b>Before reading—Practices that prepare students to read:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activate prior or build background knowledge of the content with other print or non-print media, allowing students to make or build personal connections to the content</li><li>• Show students how smart readers think using think alouds</li><li>• Develop an authentic purpose for reading by activating student questions, beliefs, and predictions about the reading</li><li>• Provide explicit content vocabulary instruction for key terms necessary to understanding the text</li></ul>
<b>During reading—Practices that help students make meaning:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scaffold instruction; then pull back support as students can “fly solo.”</li><li>• Use organizers and other tools or structures that<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Help students visual what is happening in the text (“seeing” the experiment, the event, the conflict, etc.)</li><li>○ Encourage questions about the topic as they are reading</li><li>○ Help them make inferences from the content, going beyond the information, extending their thinking</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>After reading—Practices that ask students to reflect &amp; integrate:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create experiences that require inferencing, synthesizing, and other higher order thinking skills</li><li>• Ask students to revisit their brainstorming, connections, and predictions done prior to the reading</li><li>• Create multiple opportunities for students to work together to interact with the text and deepen their understanding of the topics presented</li></ul>
<b>Alternatives to “<i>Read this for homework ...</i>”</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chunk the reading, with discussion and/or meaningful tasks at each juncture</li><li>• Jigsaw the text so each member in a group is responsible for a smaller section</li><li>• Assign excerpts from the text rather than the entire text for some readers</li><li>• Assign multiple texts and tasks, differentiated for readers’ abilities, interests, readiness, then provide opportunities for each group to share information and insights with others</li><li>• Provide “text sets,” offering students voice and choice about what they read and how they respond to their reading</li><li>• Prepare graphic organizers suited for the text type, structure/organization, and task</li><li>• Assign “reciprocal teaching” roles to readers in a group, with individual tasks helping the group to make meaning of the text (predict, clarify, question, and summarize)</li><li>• z</li></ul>
<b>Resources:</b> Daniels and Zemelman (2004). <i>Subjects matter. Every teacher’s guide to content-area reading.</i> Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Harvey (1998). <i>Nonfiction matters. Reading, writing, and research in grades 3-8.</i> Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. Rick Wormeli (2007). <i>Differentiation: From Planning to Practice, Grades 6 -12.</i> Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers and Westerville, Ohio: National Middle School Association.