

A Different Quickwrite Protocol to Promote Struggling Readers' Comprehension: Slowing Down to Speed Up Understanding

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Among other factors that have had serious consequences for delays in students' learning, certainly the pandemic of 2019 to the present has taken a toll. Furthermore, while students' access to the use of technology has had innovative and positive effects, there are changes in how students access text in the digital world versus the slower, deliberative nature of actual (reading off-line texts books, for example.) Indeed, the slower paced reading required with texts versus online offers different types of demands and there has been interesting research on the nature of reading in a linear fashion as opposed to online texts peppered with links (Carr, 2010). Also, many decry the ubiquitous use of cell phones' impact on students' attention spans and taking up much of the "reading space" of today's adolescents.

This article will explain a different form of "Quickwrite" (QW) protocol that is intended to assist readers, struggling or otherwise, with monitoring their comprehension and creating a behavioral adaptation to how they access or read text for academic learning for both informational and narrative text. The QW also "fills the space between the teacher's assignment of a reading and the students' performing the task." One of the main outcomes of this protocol is to cause the reader to slow down to enhance a more concentrated understanding of text.

In a recent article, in *California English* Lash Keith Vance notes that despite much time dedicated to "reviewing, modelling and practicing various reading strategies that slide across a plethora of screens of the electronic devices into the ether of bits and bytes-and lack of understanding." (Vance, 2022, p. 9). Furthermore, Vance's revelatory comments from students that "Reading is torture," "Reading is a chore," and "Reading is not very entertaining" are indicative of many students' attitudes toward the act of reading itself.

These observations suggest that many of our secondary students need additional support in making texts accessible, particularly for academic reading.

Effective reading is comprised of a series of behaviors that proficient readers perform almost subconsciously. The use of prediction, both at the meta-linguistic level and the conceptual level promote fluency as well as understanding. Another aspect of successful reading is the application of background knowledge readers bring to text. Prior knowledge is capital that readers require to further their understanding and allow for the previously mentioned features to be employed. Other strategies such as self-questioning, text re-inspection, stopping on a word or making sense of contextual clues are behaviors of which proficient readers may be unaware.

A study conducted by NAEP showed that many middle school students do not understand textbooks beyond a literal level. This lack of understanding is due, in part, to struggling readers' lack of effective strategy use. (Ivey, 1999). Many students feel that just glossing over the text will somehow allow them to retain important information (Santa, 2006). It has been suggested that the use of online reading in a variety of ways has made skimming the new normal for how students read. The QW protocol is designed to train the brain, or habituate the students to mimic those propensities that proficient readers have for

comprehending textual material

Navigating narrative and informational texts confounds many secondary students for several reasons. First, students who enter the world of secondary literacy find there is more demand on students to think critically rather than just memorize facts, characters and events. Academic reading puts much more distance between the reader and text in terms of language and style. Second, academic vocabulary, syntax, and tone are different along with the structure of the text. Narrative texts, or stories, are more linear; there are plots, characters, dialogue, sequence of events, and usually a climax. But there are still challenges with reading narrative that require students' background knowledge.

Informational texts are linear but in a different way. These text structures vary depending on the type of text (Buehl, Irvin, Klemp, 2007). Students might be reading a "cause and effect" in one class, a "problem solution structure in another, a "concept definition" explanation in another text, and a "time order sequence" in yet another. Third, when students become overwhelmed with content they become "snow blind" and they might abandon further reading. Readers often find themselves locked in a "Groundhog Day" dynamic of continuing to restart. Evidence can be seen by watching struggling readers attempt to read their texts. Mike Rose, in his article, "I Just Wanna Be Average," describes these readers as looking like young children who are not hungry toying with their food."

The Quickwrite protocol (QW) shown on the following page is used each day as a post-reading strategy after an in-class number of minutes of sustained reading or accompanying an assigned reading. The number of pages required might be determined by the teachers' assessment of how many pages their students can handle in one reading. Usually, teachers will "chunk" the assignment depending on their understanding of how much is too much. After each reading period students note the date, the number in the series of QW's and the range of pages that they read that day. They also track the number of the QW to keep it in sequence.

The protocol is based on three different skills that effective readers use. In the first part the student will create a paraphrase of the reading selection. Proficient readers deconstruct and then reconstruct information into a more generalized version. In the paraphrase, or rewording, the reader will translate the content into their own words making the retrieval from memory more efficient. The twenty-five word or fewer guideline forces the student to be more parsimonious and more considerate in their rendition.

Competent readers pay attention to important vocabulary that includes both known and unknown words. In the second part of the QW the reader will select five words that are either known or new, and are considered central to the topic or the plot in a fictional work. By looking back and mining the text for words, the student is doing a re-read but practices fluency since they are not doing a "cold" read. The important part of this aspect of the QW is that students must determine what five words are integral to retaining the information, thereby

creating a pattern that connects the words. What helps get the information embedded into memory is the students' explanations of their word choices. These explanations provide more deliberation about the content, and students are essentially thinking through the meaning. In the class discussion component where students do a "word share," the conversations extend to students' various reasons for selecting their words resulting in a discussion of the content. It is helpful to see the frequency of word choices and various reason for them to validate students' choices and reasons for their selections.

<p>Name: _____ Date: _____ QW # _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cooperative Literacy Quick Write Response</p> <p>Title of Selection _____</p> <p>Pages: from _____ to: _____</p> <p>Direction to students: This Quick Write Response form will allow you to formulate the "QWs" for this course. Please respond below.</p> <p>Paraphrase: In your own words (25 or fewer) what was your QW selection about?</p> <p>What were five words that you felt were important or significant. <u>Explain your reasons for your word choices in the spaces below.</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ <p>Response: What was interesting about this reading selection? What did this selection cause you to consider, ponder, appreciate, or dispute? Come up with three ideas.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

The third component of the QW is designed to move the readers' minds beyond the page. They might appreciate an idea or event, might disagree with something in the text, they might wonder more about an idea or concept, or they might consider whether an idea is important. These components of effective reading isolate certain behaviors to which the "reading brain" can habituate through extended practice. When readers take the opportunity to

consider, appreciate, ponder a particular idea, or even dispute one of the claims in the piece, they are more likely to be engaging in critical thinking. They might wonder, for example, what action a character might have taken that would change an event or outcome. With informational text there might be a question about a series of events in history or a discovery in science. This part of the QW activity promotes the "self-questioning" that proficient readers utilize.

This QW can also be used as a tool to stimulate class discussion. When a class is reading the same book, the teacher can springboard from all three sections of the QW. Students can share their paraphrases and their word choices, and the third section allows students to discuss issues related to but beyond the text itself. This component of the QW encourages students to wonder about, indicate a disagreement, or note a point of interest with the story. For example, a student who wonders about a character's actions might get input from others in the class. For a content reading selection, students might indicate what they wonder about or what they dispute as a means of starting a class discussion involving other students' views.

The QW was utilized in three different venues. One site was an urban impacted middle school in the middle of a large urban district in Southern California. Several teachers employed the QW to prepare the students for their upcoming state testing. The student groups consisted of several ESL students and Special Education students. A second venue was a continuation high school in the same district that had a mix of students who were struggling and who were close to reading on grade level. The third venue was a community college English/Reading class for students who failed to place into the English 1 college transfer course. These students were required to take classes in reading and writing to qualify for freshman English courses and beyond.

One 7th grade student commented, "The form helps me to read better by investigating what happened in the story. Also, it helps me to summarize everything I read." Another 7th grade student said, "I like this form very much. I can ask good questions and go back and find out more about the story. It helps me with my reading."

Students in the continuation high school wanted to read *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. The students were asked to use the QW at certain intervals of their reading after a fifteen-minute reading period. Students who read more pages covered more of the content, but students who read more slowly benefited from focusing on what they read as they may be likely to forget what had been in the previous sections. One student reported that "The Quickwrites really helped me keep track of where I was and helped me remember the reading."

The purpose of this exercise was to capture some of the impressions of the students but some of the teachers who employed the QW also commented. An English teacher at an urban middle school used the QW with 6th and 7th graders. She reported, "I love the "Quickwrite" form. Students really understood the content of what they were reading. The form helped them to coach through the text. I used this form with struggling readers and strategic readers. The students constantly went back to the text for details. Even in one day of using this form the students scored higher on their reading selection." Another teacher who works with Special Education students stated, "The 'Quickwrite' helped the students become confident readers, build their stamina, and lead them to reflect

with the questions. The protocol also helped to build their vocabulary and became self-starters with reading." And a high school teacher noted, "When we were first introduced to the Quickwrite I was skeptical on how my students would react to the activity. After trying the activity one time I was HOOKED. The activity is the perfect balance of reading and writing and it is a way to bridge both activities together in a way that is beneficial for all my students. When they knew they had to summarize what they read they were more invested in the article. The writing did help catapult my students into reading - even if the article may have been challenging for some of them."

The school's literacy coach and counselor also used the QW protocol in a tutoring program for ESL students. She noted, "It truly worked well with students, forced the to reread and summarize what they read. The activity also developed their vocabulary. We should use this form in their content areas for English Learners so they can manage their learning with this protocol and see how their practice pays off! I love this form."

At the community college the students in the English/Reading class read for fifteen to twenty minutes each day. They were then directed to complete their QW's. Over the next few weeks, the student accumulated a series of QW's from their reading that served as springboard for class discussion, but also gave them a convenient means of reviewing the previous reading. I allowed them to use their QW's as notes for the midterm on our novel, *Unwind* by Neal Shusterman. When one of my students handed in her "bluebook" she said, "You said that we could use our QW's for the text, but I didn't even need it!"

Another student stated, "It was helpful for me. It gave me a chance to make sure I understood the chapter I just read. If I couldn't do the QW, I needed to read the chapter again because I didn't understand it." Another student noted, "I found the QW's helpful because summarizing each section in my own words allowed me to recall, analyze, and interpret each section while progressing through my reading. I found the part of the QW where we would write what we agreed with, disagreed with, wondered about, and considered also useful in tracking my understanding of the story when flipping back through and to be able to observe my own opinions changing." Yet another student explained that for him "The QW's helped me remember the story better because I actually had to read a section then go back and remember what I had just read and then had to write about it. It was a very helpful tool."

Another community college student read *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham. Although this book was more complex than what many of the students were reading, she saw value in the process. "The QW protocol made me realize how many figures of speech can change the way a person thinks. We may hear them often or occasionally, but we never take the time to study it. Simple words can be big to some people."

My secondary credential candidates also experienced a QW as part of our class, though slightly modified for this group. I asked for two rather than three ideas or questions in the "Response" section; and I added the question, "What might be one implication for my teaching practice?" I was interested to see if they noticed any changes in their own reading habits based on the QW used for one half of the semester. Many students gained insights about their own reading and indicated that they would also be using this protocol in their own

classrooms. One student wrote, "I think this was an amazing exercise. I love that it isn't time consuming, yet it still invokes thoughtful reactions and preps the students for discussion. I think it would go great with reading assignments without adding bulk to the assignment."

A significant part of secondary literacy instruction is to "train the brain" to behave as a reader. Students may not come on this behavioral pattern naturally. Older students who struggle with reading and comprehension (and have been struggling throughout their school careers) stand to benefit from consistent use of this QW protocol that develops proficiency to pursue and organize information actively. Students who read in a slower, more deliberate manner will more likely retain more information. By concentrating on shorter selections within the text and building in processing time through the QW protocol, students will be able to mimic and therefore adapt to a behavioral pattern that potentially can increase their ability to comprehend and therefore to learn.

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