

A D O L E S C E N T W O R D S T U D Y

Module 1

Comprehension

Micro to Meta: Understanding What Understanding Looks Like

● **Activate** → ● **Build** → ● **Apply** → ● **Reflect**

4 Sessions • Approximately 5–6 Hours Total • Self-Paced

Draft — March 2026

Module 1: Comprehension

Micro to Meta: Understanding What Understanding Looks Like

Let's start with something that'll probably sound familiar. A student reads an entire chapter of their science textbook, closes it, and can't tell you a single thing about what they just read. Or they can parrot back a few facts but totally miss the argument the author was building. Or — and this one's the sneakiest — they seem to understand in class discussion but fall apart on the written assessment.

We call all of these “comprehension problems.” But they're not the same problem at all. And until we get specific about where comprehension is breaking down, we can't do much to fix it.

That's what this module is about. We're going to build a framework for thinking about comprehension that goes from the smallest level — understanding individual words and sentences — all the way up to meta-comprehension, which is the ability to monitor and regulate your own understanding. We're calling it the “micro-to-meta” framework, and it'll become the lens you use for the rest of this course.

Module Learning Goals

By the end of this module, you'll be able to: (1) describe comprehension as a multi-level process from word-level to meta-cognitive, (2) identify where specific students are breaking down using the micro-to-meta framework, (3) match comprehension instruction to the level where the breakdown is happening, and (4) articulate how the other five pillars (vocabulary, morphology, decoding, fluency, and knowledge) feed into comprehension at different levels.

Session Overview

Time	Component	Description
Session 1	Activate	What do we really mean by “comprehension”? Surface assumptions, experience a comprehension breakdown firsthand, and introduce the micro-to-meta framework.
Session 2	Build	Deep dive into each comprehension level: micro (word/sentence), macro (paragraph/passage/cross-text), and meta (self-monitoring). Research, examples, and video models.
Session 3	Apply	Diagnose comprehension breakdowns in real student reading. Map a content-area text across levels. Design a targeted think-aloud. Complete the practice task.
Session 4	Reflect	Connect comprehension to the other five pillars. Self-assess. Share your text analysis with peers and get feedback.

Session 1: Activate

What Do We Really Mean by “Comprehension”?

● Session at a Glance

Estimated time: 60–75 minutes. This session creates productive dissonance by putting participants in the shoes of a struggling reader, surfaces their current assumptions about how comprehension works, and introduces the micro-to-meta framework they’ll use throughout the course.

Session Flow

Time	Component	Description
10 min	Opening Hook	The Provocation Passage — experience a comprehension breakdown firsthand
10 min	Video Segment 1	Why “comprehension” is more complex than we usually treat it
10 min	Interactive Activity	Assumption Audit — surface and examine current beliefs about comprehension
12 min	Video Segment 2	The micro-to-meta framework introduced
15 min	Discussion	Where do your students break down?
5 min	Quick Check	Self-assessment on the micro-to-meta levels

Opening Hook: The Provocation Passage

Before we talk about what comprehension is, you’re going to experience what it feels like when it breaks down. Not for your students — for you.

Here’s the task: read the following passage carefully. It’s only about 200 words. When you’re done, you’ll answer a few questions about it.

Passage: Excerpt from a Metallurgy Research Article

The precipitation-hardened austenitic matrix exhibited a bimodal grain distribution following thermomechanical processing at 1050°C. Secondary γ' precipitates, coherent with the FCC lattice, were observed along grain boundaries and within the intragranular regions. The Orowan bypass mechanism dominated dislocation-precipitate interactions when the mean precipitate spacing exceeded 85 nm, transitioning to precipitate shearing at finer dispersions. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy revealed a passivation layer with charge-transfer resistance of $4.7 \text{ k}\Omega \cdot \text{cm}^2$, suggesting adequate corrosion resistance for marine applications despite the sensitization observed in the heat-affected zone.

Now answer these:

1. What's the main finding of this passage?
2. What's the relationship between precipitate spacing and the dislocation mechanism?
3. Would this material be appropriate for use in saltwater environments? How do you know?

How'd that go? If you're not a materials scientist, probably not great. And here's the thing worth sitting with: you can read every word in that passage. Your decoding is fine. Your fluency is fine. You even recognize some of the individual words. But comprehension? It fell apart.

Now ask yourself: where exactly did it fall apart? Was it at the word level (you didn't know what "austenitic" or "Orowan bypass" meant)? The sentence level (you could define the words but couldn't parse how they related to each other in that syntax)? The passage level (you followed individual sentences but couldn't construct the overall argument)? Or the monitoring level (you kept reading even though you'd lost the thread three sentences in)?

Probably all of the above, to some degree. And that's exactly the point. Comprehension isn't one thing. It's a bunch of things happening at different levels simultaneously. When we tell a struggling student to "re-read more carefully," we're not helping — because we haven't figured out which level is the problem.

 **Facilitator Note**

This passage is deliberately chosen to be outside most educators' domain knowledge. The goal isn't to make people feel bad — it's to create empathy for what adolescent struggling readers experience every day in content-area classrooms, and to make the abstract idea of "multi-level comprehension" concrete and personal.

Video Segment 1: Comprehension Is Not One Thing

 **Comprehension Is Not One Thing** (8–10 minutes)

- Open with the common classroom scenario: teacher says "they just don't get it" — but what does "it" mean?
- The problem with treating comprehension as a single skill: "find the main idea" as the default (and often only) comprehension instruction in secondary
- Brief history: how reading instruction shifted after elementary, leaving secondary teachers without tools for comprehension instruction
- Data point: NAEP reading scores for 8th and 12th graders have been essentially flat for decades — what we're doing isn't working
- Preview the framework: there's a better way to think about this, and it starts with getting specific about WHERE comprehension breaks down
- Close with: "Think about your students. When they struggle with a text, what does it actually look like? Hold that thought."

Interactive Activity: The Assumption Audit

Before we go further, let's surface what you currently believe about comprehension. There's no wrong answers here — the point is to get your thinking visible so you can track how it shifts over this module.

Activity Instructions

Respond to each statement with Agree, Disagree, or It's Complicated. Then write 1–2 sentences explaining your thinking. You'll revisit these at the end of the module.

Statement 1: If a student can decode all the words in a passage, comprehension should follow.

Statement 2: The best way to improve comprehension is to teach comprehension strategies like summarizing, questioning, and predicting.

Statement 3: Comprehension is mostly about the reader's skill level. A "good reader" should be able to comprehend any text.

Statement 4: When a student doesn't understand a text, the most helpful thing is to have them re-read it more carefully.

Statement 5: Teaching vocabulary is the most important thing a secondary teacher can do to improve comprehension.

Save your responses. You'll come back to them in Session 4.

Video Segment 2: The Micro-to-Meta Framework

Introducing the Micro-to-Meta Framework (10–12 minutes)

- Frame: "We need a way to get specific about comprehension. Here's the framework we'll use for the rest of this course."
- MICRO-COMPREHENSION: word-level (knowing what words mean), sentence-level (parsing syntax, resolving pronouns, making local inferences). This is where vocabulary and decoding live.
- MACRO-COMPREHENSION: paragraph-level (how ideas connect within a paragraph), passage-level (main idea, text structure, author's purpose), cross-text (comparing, synthesizing, evaluating across sources). This is where background knowledge and text structure knowledge live.
- META-COMPREHENSION: self-monitoring (do I know when I'm confused?), calibration (how accurate is my self-assessment?), repair strategies (what do I do when I notice I'm lost?). This is the executive function layer.
- Key insight: most secondary instruction targets macro-comprehension (main idea, author's purpose) but ignores micro and meta. That's a problem because macro won't work if micro is broken, and none of it works without meta.
- Analogy: it's like trying to teach someone to drive on the highway when they can't operate the steering wheel (micro) and don't check their mirrors (meta).
- Visual: show the framework as a layered model — micro at the base, macro in the middle, meta wrapping around the whole thing.
- Close with: "In Session 2, we'll unpack each level in detail. For now, just start noticing: when your students struggle, which level are they struggling at?"

Discussion

Discussion Prompt

Think about a specific student (or a type of student) you've taught who struggles with comprehension. Using the micro-to-meta framework, where do you think the breakdown is happening — and what makes you think that? Be as specific as you can. Describe what you actually observe them doing (or not doing) when they read.

Follow-up thread options:

- Respond to at least one peer: do you see the same pattern? Or would you diagnose the breakdown differently?
- Has the provocation passage changed how you think about what “comprehension” means? How?
- What's one assumption from the Assumption Audit that you're now questioning?

Quick Check

Quick Check

1. In your own words, what's the difference between micro-comprehension and macro-comprehension?
2. A student reads a history passage and can answer factual recall questions but can't explain the author's argument. Which comprehension level is likely the problem?
3. A student reads a sentence three times and still can't figure out what it means. What level might be involved?
4. What does meta-comprehension mean, and why does it matter for adolescent readers?
5. Why is it a problem if most secondary comprehension instruction focuses only on the macro level?

Session 2: Build

The Comprehension Levels, Unpacked

Session at a Glance

Estimated time: 75–90 minutes. This is the core content session. Participants go deep on each comprehension level — what it involves, what it looks like when it breaks down, and what the research says. By the end, they should be able to look at a student’s reading behavior and place the breakdown at the right level.

Session Flow

Time	Component	Description
5 min	Opening	Reconnect to Session 1 — quick recap of the framework and where we’re headed
12 min	Video Segment 3	The Simple View of Reading and micro-comprehension
10 min	Interactive Activity	Sentence-level parsing challenge
12 min	Video Segment 4	Macro-comprehension: text structure, main idea, and beyond
10 min	Reading	Research summary on meta-comprehension and calibration
12 min	Video Segment 5	Meta-comprehension and the strategies-aren’t-enough problem
10 min	Video Models	Watch three adolescent readers and identify the breakdown level
5 min	Quick Check	Can you diagnose the level?

Video Segment 3: The Simple View and Micro-Comprehension

The Simple View of Reading and Micro-Comprehension (10–12 minutes)

- Start with the Simple View: Reading Comprehension = Decoding × Language Comprehension. Why the multiplication sign matters (if either is zero, comprehension is zero).
- Why this formula still matters in secondary: we tend to assume decoding is “done” by middle school. It’s not (preview of Module 4).
- Language comprehension at the micro level: what’s actually happening when you process a single sentence?
- Vocabulary knowledge: if you don’t know what a word means, you can’t build meaning from the sentence. But it’s not just about definitions — it’s about depth of word knowledge (preview of Module 2).
- Syntax parsing: academic text uses complex syntax that everyday conversation doesn’t. Embedded clauses, passive constructions, nominalizations. Many adolescents stumble here.
- Anaphora resolution: tracking pronouns and referents across sentences. “The council voted to approve the measure despite opposition from several members who argued it would...” — what does “it” refer to?

- Bridging inferences: the information the text doesn't state explicitly but expects the reader to fill in. "The temperature dropped below freezing. The roads became dangerous." — the reader must supply the link (ice).
- Key takeaway: micro-comprehension failures are invisible. The student looks like they're reading. They might even be fluent. But meaning isn't building.

Interactive Activity: The Sentence-Level Challenge

Time to experience micro-comprehension demands firsthand. Below are four sentences pulled from real middle school and high school textbooks. For each one, identify: (a) what makes this sentence hard to parse, and (b) what a student would need to know or do to understand it.

Sentence 1 (8th Grade Science)

"The mitochondria, which are often referred to as the powerhouses of the cell because of their role in converting nutrients into adenosine triphosphate, are found in nearly all eukaryotic organisms."

Sentence 2 (10th Grade History)

"The legislation, opposed by Southern Democrats who viewed it as an overreach of federal authority, was nonetheless signed into law by the President, whose support had wavered in the weeks preceding the vote."

Sentence 3 (7th Grade Math)

"The ratio of the area of the shaded region to the area of the unshaded region can be expressed as a fraction in which the numerator represents the difference between the total area and the area of the triangle."

Sentence 4 (11th Grade ELA)

"What the narrator fails to acknowledge, despite the mounting evidence presented throughout the preceding chapters, is that his own complicity in the events he describes undermines the moral authority he claims."

For each sentence, note: What vocabulary is required? What syntactic structures make it complex? What background knowledge does the reader need? What inferences must the reader make? If a student said "I don't get it," which of these would you address first?

Video Segment 4: Macro-Comprehension

Macro-Comprehension: Seeing the Bigger Picture (10–12 minutes)

- Transition: "If micro-comprehension is about building meaning from words and sentences, macro-comprehension is about building meaning from paragraphs, whole passages, and across multiple texts."

- Paragraph-level: how ideas connect within a paragraph. Topic sentences, supporting details, logical relationships (cause-effect, compare-contrast, chronological sequence). Why this matters: students who process sentence-by-sentence without tracking paragraph-level connections end up with fragments, not understanding.
- Passage-level: constructing a main idea or central argument from the full text. This requires text structure knowledge — recognizing that a text is organized as problem-solution, or argument-counterargument, and using that structure to build meaning.
- Author’s purpose and perspective: why was this written? Who’s the intended audience? What’s the author’s stance? Critical for secondary — especially in social studies and ELA where texts have agendas.
- Cross-text comprehension: comparing, contrasting, synthesizing, and evaluating across multiple sources. The skill demanded by every research project and many standardized assessments, but rarely taught explicitly.
- The background knowledge connection: macro-comprehension depends heavily on what the reader already knows about the topic and the text type. A reader with relevant knowledge builds the bigger picture much more easily (preview of Module 6).
- Key takeaway: most secondary comprehension instruction lives here — “find the main idea,” “identify the author’s purpose.” That’s not wrong, but it’s incomplete. If micro is broken, macro instruction won’t land.

Reading: Meta-Comprehension Research

Reading: Meta-Comprehension: Do Students Know When They Don’t Understand?

This curated research summary (provided as a PDF in course materials) covers: the concept of meta-comprehension and calibration accuracy, research by Dunlosky & Lipko on how poorly most students judge their own understanding, the “illusion of knowing” phenomenon in adolescent readers, and practical implications for instruction. Read the summary (approximately 15 minutes) and highlight the finding that surprises you most. You’ll use this in the next video segment.

Video Segment 5: Meta-Comprehension and the Strategies Problem

Meta-Comprehension: The Layer Nobody Teaches (10–12 minutes)

- What is meta-comprehension? It’s not a comprehension level like micro and macro — it’s the monitoring system that wraps around the whole thing. Do I understand? How well do I understand? What should I do when I don’t understand?
- Calibration: research shows most adolescents are terrible at judging how well they understand a text. They think they understand when they don’t (the illusion of knowing). This is especially true for students with less background knowledge.
- Repair strategies: what skilled readers do when they notice a breakdown — re-read, slow down, look up a word, connect to what they already know, ask a question. Struggling readers either don’t notice the breakdown or don’t have strategies to fix it.
- The strategies problem: in the 1990s and 2000s, reading instruction swung hard toward “comprehension strategies” (predicting, questioning, summarizing, visualizing). These aren’t bad. But the research is clear: strategy instruction alone has limited impact if vocabulary, knowledge, and decoding aren’t also strong. Strategies are tools for meta-comprehension, but they can’t compensate for gaps in the lower levels.
- The nuanced view: strategy instruction works best when (a) it’s brief and targeted, (b) it’s paired with knowledge and vocabulary building, and (c) it focuses on monitoring and repair rather than just following a set procedure.
- Key takeaway: we need to teach students to be aware of their own comprehension process — but that’s only useful if there’s something to be aware of. If they don’t have the vocabulary, the background knowledge, and the decoding skills, monitoring an empty process doesn’t help.

Video Models: Three Readers, Three Breakdowns

Watch three short video clips (2–3 minutes each) of real adolescent readers working through content-area text. For each one, your task is to identify: where is comprehension breaking down, and at which level of the micro-to-meta framework?

Reader A: Marcus, 7th Grade

Reading a science passage about plate tectonics. Marcus reads fluently and at a reasonable rate. He can answer literal recall questions (“What are the three types of plate boundaries?”) but can’t explain how they relate to each other or why the author organized the passage the way they did. When asked to summarize, he lists facts in the order they appeared rather than constructing an overview.

Reader B: Aisha, 9th Grade

Reading a social studies primary source (a speech from the Civil Rights Movement). Aisha stumbles over several words (“disenfranchisement,” “constitutional,” “propriety”) and frequently pauses mid-sentence. When asked what the speaker is arguing, she says “I don’t know, it was confusing.” When the teacher reads the same passage aloud to her and explains three key words, Aisha immediately grasps the argument.

Reader C: Devon, 11th Grade

Reading a literary analysis essay. Devon reads confidently and doesn’t flag any confusion. He says he understood it. But when asked to explain the author’s thesis, his summary contradicts the actual argument. When shown the discrepancy, he’s surprised. “I thought I understood it.”

After watching each clip, respond in your notes: What level is the primary breakdown? What evidence supports your diagnosis? What would you do differently for each of these three readers? (They don’t need the same intervention.)

Quick Check

Quick Check

1. The Simple View of Reading is $R = D \times LC$. Explain in your own words why the multiplication sign (rather than addition) matters.
2. Give an example of a bridging inference a reader might need to make in a text from your content area.
3. What’s the difference between understanding a text’s main idea (macro) and knowing whether you’ve understood it (meta)?
4. A student can summarize each paragraph individually but can’t explain what the whole article is about. Is this a micro, macro, or meta issue? Explain.

5. Why might teaching comprehension strategies alone not be enough to improve reading outcomes for struggling adolescent readers?

Session 3: Apply

Diagnosing and Addressing Comprehension Breakdowns

Session at a Glance

Estimated time: 75–90 minutes. This is the hands-on session. Participants take the framework they’ve built and use it — analyzing real texts, diagnosing real student reading behaviors, and designing targeted instruction. The practice task at the end is a portfolio piece.

Session Flow

Time	Component	Description
5 min	Opening	Quick reconnect: the micro-to-meta framework recap
12 min	Video Segment 6	How to use the framework diagnostically
20 min	Text Mapping Activity	Map a content-area text across comprehension levels
15 min	Case Study Analysis	Diagnose three adolescent readers using the framework
10 min	Video Segment 7	Designing targeted think-alouds
30 min	Practice Task	Text analysis and comprehension plan (portfolio piece)

Video Segment 6: Using the Framework Diagnostically

From Framework to Classroom: The Diagnostic Lens (10–12 minutes)

- Now that you know the levels, how do you actually figure out where a student is breaking down?
- The diagnostic question sequence: Can they read the words? (Decoding/fluency.) Do they know what the words mean? (Vocabulary/micro.) Can they parse individual sentences? (Micro.) Can they connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs? (Macro.) Can they identify the text’s overall structure and argument? (Macro.) Do they know when they’re confused? (Meta.)
- The power of listening to students read aloud: what miscues, pauses, and re-readings tell you about where they’re stuck
- Beyond reading aloud: think-aloud protocols, retelling, and targeted questioning as diagnostic tools
- The critical insight: the intervention must match the level. Teaching “find the main idea” to a student with micro-level breakdowns is like teaching someone to drive on the highway when they can’t steer.
- Demonstration: walk through diagnosing a sample student reading, showing how you’d work down through the levels to find the breakdown point

Activity: Text Mapping

This is where you start applying the framework to your own teaching. Choose a challenging text you'll be assigning to students soon — something that you know will give at least some of them trouble.

Text Mapping Instructions

Select a passage of about 300–500 words from your content area. Then work through it level by level, annotating for: (1) Micro demands — mark vocabulary that might be unknown, flag complex sentence structures, identify where bridging inferences are required; (2) Macro demands — identify the text structure, note where main ideas are stated vs. implied, flag places where the reader must synthesize across paragraphs; (3) Meta demands — where might a student think they understand but actually not? Where is the “illusion of knowing” most likely? What self-monitoring moves would a skilled reader make?

As you work through this, you'll probably notice that a single passage has demands at every level. That's normal. The question isn't “which level is this text at?” but “where will my particular students break down, and what can I do about it before, during, and after reading?”

Activity: Case Study Analysis

Now apply your diagnostic thinking to student reading behavior. Below are three brief case studies. For each one, identify the primary comprehension level where the breakdown is occurring, explain your reasoning, and suggest one instructional move that targets that specific level.

Case Study 1: Jaylen, 8th Grade ELA

Jaylen is reading a short story. He can decode the words accurately and reads at an appropriate rate. He correctly identifies characters and basic plot events. But when asked what the story is really about — its theme — he looks confused. “It's about a kid who runs away from home?” He can retell events in sequence but can't explain why the author made certain choices or what the ending is supposed to make the reader feel.

Case Study 2: Maria, 6th Grade Science

Maria is reading about the water cycle. She reads slowly, mispronouncing “evaporation,” “condensation,” and “precipitation.” She stops frequently and re-reads sentences. When asked what the passage is about, she gives a surprisingly accurate summary: “Water goes up, turns into clouds, and comes back down as rain.” But it took her four times longer than her peers to finish, and she says she “hates reading.”

Case Study 3: Tyler, 10th Grade History

Tyler reads a primary source document from World War I. He reads fluently and says he understood it. His written response to “What is the author arguing?” is confident but wrong — he's attributed a position to the author that contradicts the text. When the teacher asks him to point to where the

author says that, Tyler re-reads and realizes his interpretation doesn't match. "Oh. I guess I missed that part."

Video Segment 7: Designing Targeted Think-Alouds

The Think-Aloud as a Teaching Tool (8–10 minutes)

- What is a think-aloud? Making your invisible reading process visible to students by saying out loud what you're doing as you read.
- Why it works: it gives students a model for what skilled reading sounds like inside someone's head. But — and this is key — a think-aloud is only useful if it targets the right comprehension level.
- A micro-level think-aloud: "This word 'reciprocal' — I know 're' means back, and this is related to 'reciprocate,' so it's about something going back and forth..." or "This sentence has a lot of clauses. Let me figure out the main subject and verb first, then add the details."
- A macro-level think-aloud: "The author started with a claim and now is giving evidence. I'm going to track whether this evidence actually supports the claim..." or "I've read three paragraphs — let me pause and figure out how they connect."
- A meta-level think-aloud: "Hmm, I just read that paragraph and I'm not sure I got it. I'm going to re-read the first two sentences because I think I lost the thread when the author switched examples."
- Common mistake: teachers who think-aloud only at the macro level ("The main idea here is..."). For struggling readers, they need to see micro and meta moves too.
- Demo: a full think-aloud of a short passage, deliberately targeting all three levels, with annotations showing which level each move addresses.

Practice Task

Practice Task: Text Analysis and Comprehension Plan

This is your portfolio artifact for Module 1. You'll select a content-area text, analyze it through the micro-to-meta framework, and design a comprehension support plan that targets specific levels. This should be a text you're actually going to teach — not a hypothetical.

Step 1: Choose a passage (300–500 words) from an upcoming unit in your content area.

Step 2: Complete a full text map: annotate micro demands (vocabulary, syntax, inferences), macro demands (text structure, main idea, cross-paragraph connections), and meta demands (where the "illusion of knowing" is most likely).

Step 3: Identify your students: Based on what you know about your current students, predict where the most common breakdowns will occur. Which students will struggle at which levels?

Step 4: Design a comprehension plan with at least one instructional move for each level: (a) one micro-level support (e.g., pre-teach key vocabulary, parse a complex sentence together), (b) one macro-level support (e.g., graphic organizer for text structure, guided main-idea construction), (c) one meta-level support (e.g., think-aloud modeling a repair strategy, comprehension monitoring checkpoint).

Step 5: Write a brief think-aloud script (5–8 sentences) that you would use to model reading a portion of this text for your students. Label which comprehension level each think-aloud move targets.

Step 6: Reflect in 3–5 sentences: What did the text mapping process reveal that you wouldn't have noticed otherwise? How does this change how you'll approach this text with students?

Session 4: Reflect

Connecting Comprehension to the Five Other Pillars

Session at a Glance

Estimated time: 50–60 minutes. This session zooms out. Participants connect what they’ve learned about comprehension to the five remaining pillars they’ll study in Modules 2–6. They also revisit their initial assumptions, self-assess, and share their text analysis for peer feedback.

Session Flow

Time	Component	Description
5 min	Opening	The big question: if comprehension depends on all six pillars, what does that mean for instruction?
12 min	Video Segment 8	The pillar connections — how vocabulary, decoding, fluency, morphology, and knowledge feed comprehension
10 min	Revisit Activity	Return to the Assumption Audit from Session 1
10 min	Self-Assessment	Rate your current practice across comprehension levels
15 min	Discussion	Share your text analysis and get peer feedback
5 min	Looking Ahead	Preview of Module 2: Vocabulary

Video Segment 8: The Pillar Connections

How the Other Five Pillars Feed Comprehension (10–12 minutes)

- Frame: “Comprehension is the goal. But it’s not an isolated skill. It’s the result of everything else working together.”
- Vocabulary → Comprehension: unknown words break micro-comprehension immediately. But it’s not just Tier 3 content words — it’s Tier 2 academic words that show up everywhere and create subtle understanding gaps.
- Morphology → Comprehension: knowing word parts helps readers make meaning of unknown words on the fly, supporting micro-comprehension in real time without teacher support.
- Decoding → Comprehension: if cognitive resources are consumed by figuring out what the words are, there’s nothing left for figuring out what they mean. The Simple View in action.
- Fluency → Comprehension: disfluent reading disrupts the sentence-level processing that micro-comprehension depends on. You can’t build meaning from a sentence if you’re reading it three words at a time.
- Background Knowledge → Comprehension: knowledge drives macro-comprehension. A reader who knows a lot about the topic builds the bigger picture almost automatically. A reader without that knowledge has to construct everything from scratch — and often can’t.
- The implication: if you want to improve comprehension, you can’t just teach comprehension. You have to identify and address the pillar(s) that are causing the breakdown. That’s what the rest of this course is about.

Activity: Revisit the Assumption Audit

Pull up your responses from Session 1. Read through each statement again and your original response. For each one, write a brief update: has your thinking shifted? What would you change? What stayed the same?

Pay particular attention to Statement 2 (“The best way to improve comprehension is to teach comprehension strategies”) and Statement 3 (“Comprehension is mostly about the reader’s skill level”). These are the two where the micro-to-meta framework and the pillar connections tend to create the biggest shifts.

Self-Assessment: Your Comprehension Instruction Profile

Rate yourself honestly on each item below using a 1–4 scale: 1 = I don’t do this at all, 2 = I do this occasionally or inconsistently, 3 = I do this regularly but could strengthen it, 4 = This is a consistent strength in my practice.

Micro-Comprehension Instruction

I explicitly teach vocabulary that’s needed for upcoming texts. I help students parse complex sentences. I point out where bridging inferences are required. I address word-level and sentence-level understanding, not just passage-level.

Macro-Comprehension Instruction

I teach text structure explicitly. I help students construct main ideas (not just find them). I give students practice with cross-text comparison and synthesis. I address author’s purpose and perspective.

Meta-Comprehension Instruction

I model self-monitoring through think-alouds. I teach repair strategies for when comprehension breaks down. I help students calibrate their understanding (check whether they really get it). I build in comprehension checkpoints, not just end-of-reading assessments.

Look at your scores. Where are your strengths? Where are your blind spots? Most secondary teachers score highest on macro and lowest on micro and meta. That’s not a personal failure — it’s a reflection of how most of us were trained. The rest of this course gives you tools for the areas that need building.

Discussion



Discussion Prompt

Share your text analysis and comprehension plan from the Session 3 practice task. Then respond to at least two peers with specific, constructive feedback. Focus on: Did they identify comprehension demands you would have missed? Does their instructional plan match the levels where breakdowns are most likely? What would you add or adjust?

Follow-up thread options:

- What was the most surprising thing you noticed when you mapped your text across comprehension levels?
- How has the micro-to-meta framework changed how you think about students you've previously labeled as "low comprehenders"?
- Looking at your self-assessment, what's the one area you're most motivated to work on? Why?

Looking Ahead: Module 2

Now that you've got the comprehension framework in place, we're going to zoom in on the pillar that has the single biggest impact on micro-comprehension: vocabulary. Module 2 takes you deep into Beck's Three-Tier Model — but we go way beyond just categorizing words. You'll learn which words to teach, how to teach them for deep processing, and how to build students who are genuinely curious about language.

But here's the thing to carry forward: everything you learn about vocabulary in Module 2 connects back to the comprehension framework you built here. When we talk about Tier 2 words, you'll see them through the micro-comprehension lens. When we talk about word consciousness, you'll recognize it as a meta-comprehension support. The pillars don't stand alone. Neither do the modules.



Module 1 Complete

You've finished the Comprehension module. Make sure your practice task (text analysis and comprehension plan) is saved to your portfolio. You'll reference it again in Module 7 when you design an integrated lesson that combines multiple pillars.