
Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about when it is recommended students read the questions on standardized reading assessments. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

Question: *Can you please provide any research citations regarding test taking strategies where it is not recommended that students read questions first then read the passage on a standardized reading assessment?*

Search Process

Key words and search strings used in the search: *pre reading questions AND comprehension tests; questioning techniques AND comprehension assessment OR comprehension assessment AND before reading*

Search databases and websites:

1. ERIC, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar, www.google.com/scholar
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources, <http://ies.ed.gov>
5. What Works Clearinghouse, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Results:

Based on the database searches described above, there were no results that reflected *rigorous research*, as defined by the Department of Education – Institute of Education Sciences. Below are some resources that addressed test taking strategies such as whether or not students should read the questions before the passage.

Sample Citations Retrieved (*NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy*):

Bishop, S. N., & Frisbie, D. A. (1999). *The effects of different test-taking conditions on reading comprehension test performance*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 18-22, 1999).

Abstract/Summary: Prior research has shown that test takers use a variety of strategies when taking passage-based reading comprehension tests. The specific effects that these alternative strategies have on actual examinee test performance are largely unknown. Evidence suggesting that performance differences exist across testing conditions would imply that the meanings and interpretations that are associated with the corresponding test scores have limited generalizability. In other words, this is an issue related to the validity of the scores from reading comprehension tests. This study addressed the question of whether different test-taking conditions affect reading comprehension test performance (as indicated by total test scores and work rates) and whether the grade level or item cognitive/process classification interacts with the test-taking approach. More than 300 students in grades 3, 5, and 7 took the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills reading comprehension test in conditions that asked them to read the questions before reading the passage or to read the passage before reading the questions. Significant differences were observed in both test scores and work rates. Students in the passages-first condition (standard test directions) had higher test scores at each grade level. Implications for testing practice are discussed.

Perlman, C. L. (1988). *Should they read the questions first? A comparison of two test-taking strategies for elementary students*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).

Abstract/Summary: The usefulness of before-adjunct questions with standardized multiple-choice tests in increasing reading comprehension scores was studied by examining the relative effectiveness of reading test questions first or reading the passage first. Subjects were 210 fourth graders randomly assigned to two treatment groups. The Level 9 Reading Comprehension subtest of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (Form 8) was administered. In each school included in the study, one classroom was randomly assigned the passage first treatment, and the other classroom was randomly assigned the question first treatment. There was a slight trend indicating that those who read the questions first outperformed the others on literal comprehension items, but the results were not conclusive. It would not be appropriate to generalize these results to other grade and ability levels. Although much time and money is spent teaching test-taking skills, it is not always clear what practices are helpful. Lower-achieving students might do better in generalization skills when they have some questions to guide them. Seven tables present the data.

Referrals

Organizations:

- International Association for Educational Assessment: <http://www.iaea.info/>
- *Institute of Education Sciences Resources (IES)*: <http://ies.ed.gov/>
- What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>)

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