

**BARBARA CARRETTI, AMBRA FASTELLI,
DAVIDE FAZZOLARI AND
ELEONORA PIZZIGALLO**

UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

A Guide for Parents,
Educators and Professionals

UNDERSTANDING ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT



Understanding and Improving Reading Comprehension in Children and Adolescents

This concise, accessible guide bridges the gap between scientific research and practical application, offering parents and professionals in educational and psychological settings a clear understanding of reading comprehension difficulties in children and adolescents.

Drawing on evidence-based approaches, this book explores the fundamental nature of reading comprehension and its critical role in everyday life, the key theoretical models explaining how comprehension develops and functions, and why some children with adequate decoding skills still struggle to understand texts. It presents early intervention strategies for preschoolers and pre-readers, metacognitive techniques and strategic instruction methods, and practical approaches for integrating comprehension into broader study skills.

Whether you're supporting a child or an adolescent who finds reading challenging, or seeking to enhance comprehension, this guide equips you with actionable strategies to identify comprehension problems early and implement effective techniques at home and in school, ultimately fostering understanding, achievement, and a lifelong love of reading.

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This volume is one of a rapidly developing series in *Understanding Atypical Development*, published by Routledge. This book series is a set of basic, concise guides on various developmental disorders or issues of atypical development. The books are aimed at parents, but also professionals in health, education, social care and related fields, and are focused on providing insights into the aspects of the condition that can be troubling to children, and what can be done about it. Each volume is grounded in scientific theory but with an accessible writing style, making them ideal for a wide variety of audiences.

Each volume in the series is published in hardback, paperback and eBook formats. More information about the series is available on the official website at: <https://www.routledge.com/Understanding-Atypical-Development/book-series/UATYPDEV>, including details of all the titles published to date.

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Series Preface

Statistical data supports the notion that the incidence of developmental disorders, and, more generally, the presence of atypical behaviors in childhood and youth, is increasing in the population around the world. This does not necessarily depend on the fact that pathological conditions are widespread. It might be the outcome of increased interest toward the conditions of children and adolescents, greater diffusion of knowledge about the features of atypical development, or higher levels of sophistication and implementation that diagnostic procedures have reached. In any case, adults who have to support and drive the growth of the younger generations are challenged to find effective ways to manage situations that require special attention. Specialists who take care of children and adolescents with special needs can do a part of this work. But another part is the responsibility of people who live with those children and adolescents, and interact with them outside the therapeutic setting. The contribution of parents, teachers, and trainers in extra-school domains (such as sport, art, hobbies, edutainment, religious education, and social activities) can be relevant. These people should be knowledgeable about the effective ways of communicating, engaging, instructing, monitoring, and tutoring atypically developing children and adolescents in order to support their growth efficiently. This book series tries to fit this need.

This series aims to be a set of basic, concise guides on various developmental disorders or issues of atypical development. The books provide insights into the aspects of the condition that can be troubling to children and adolescents and what can be done about them. Each volume follows a basic structure and is grounded in scientific theory but written very accessibly for the target audience. Typically, each book faces the following issues:

- Signs and symptoms of the disorder
- What causes the disorder
- Available treatments and therapies

- Living with the condition
- Practical ways to help children with the disorder and to support caregivers
- Communicating the diagnosis to peers
- Cultural differences and sensitivities.

The series is written for parents, caregivers, and professionals, with particular emphasis on health, social care, and education. The books are of value to practitioners in clinical and educational psychology, counseling, mental health, nursing, teacher training, child welfare, social work, and youth work as well. Professionals and trainees involved in relevant medical disciplines—including midwives, health visitors, school nursing, and public health professionals—and those in general practice, as well as those involved in education including teachers, classroom assistants, and all those concerned with early years can benefit from the books.

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Editor of the series *Understanding Atypical Development*

Introduction

Learning to read is a pivotal objective in our literate society. In everyday life, we read different types of texts for various purposes. We read to get informed, choose the right product to buy, escape from routines, and experience new perspectives on the world. Written material is often the foundation of school learning; therefore, the development of reading comprehension abilities is fundamental for knowledge acquisition. Reading comprehension is indeed core to academic progress because it underpins content-area learning in all subjects. However, for many children, the messages conveyed by texts are not always well understood, leading to negative consequences for learning outcomes and their well-being as students.

The objective of this book is to guide parents and educators to promote reading comprehension abilities.

Using This Book

This book is divided into two parts. The first part begins with Chapter 1, which provides a general introduction to the key characteristics of reading comprehension. Chapter 2 explores theoretical models and research findings that explain how reading comprehension operates. Chapter 3 focuses on children who, despite having adequate decoding skills, experience difficulties in understanding texts.

The second part offers specific strategies for enhancing reading comprehension. Chapter 4 addresses preschoolers or children who have not yet mastered reading decoding, emphasizing activities to support language comprehension. Chapter 5 highlights the role of metacognition and the instruction of foundational components (such as how to recognize basic text structure) along with strategies for improving reading comprehension. It is intended for students in the school age (Grades 3–6). Finally, Chapter 6 situates reading comprehension within the broader context of study skills.

The last three chapters are independent of one another. This means that readers interested in understanding how to promote reading comprehension in primary school children will find all the necessary information in Chapter 5, even without reading Chapter 4. This implies a certain degree of redundancy between the chapters, but in our view, this ensures that the book is easier to consult.



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Understanding Reading Comprehension and Its Underlying Processes

Comprehension is essential in everyday life for making informed decisions and in education, where written texts are the primary source of learning. This chapter provides a definition of reading comprehension and examines the variables involved in understanding. Deep understanding requires integrating information, making inferences, and using metacognitive strategies based on the purpose of reading. Text characteristics also matter; in particular, the role of text genre has been extensively analyzed in the literature with an advantage of narrative texts over expository ones, which demand more prior knowledge and cognitive effort. Finally, environmental factors such as family and school contexts play a crucial role, and practices like summer reading programs or dialogic reading can effectively support vocabulary growth and comprehension skills.

1.1 The Processes Involved in Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that involves language, cognitive, and metacognitive components. To understand a text, a reader must recognize words (phonological and decoding abilities), retrieve their meanings (vocabulary), and understand their roles within the sentence (grammar knowledge). The integration of this information is not always sufficient; it may also be necessary to consider the social use of language (pragmatics).

An example can clarify this point:

Mary was upset because she had lost her bracelet. “It’s no use crying over spilled milk,” she told herself to overcome her sadness.

Beyond the literal understanding of the sentence (which involves retrieving the meanings of the words and integrating them into the sentence),