Handout 6.2: LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION AND QUESTION TYPES

Experts agree that understanding listening or reading texts generally includes three main levels of comprehension:

- **Literal**: which involves understanding the specific information in the text (e.g., comprehending the main ideas, factual details, stated points of view).
- **Interpretive**: which involves integrating information and making inferences. At the interpretive level, readers/listeners make connections between ideas found at the literal level (e.g., to their own lives, to the outside world, etc.). They also make inferences (e.g., about the relationship between speakers, the meanings of unfamiliar words from the context, etc.).
- **Applied**: which involves using information from the text to construct knowledge (e.g., to express opinions and form new ideas based on information in text)

Comprehension questions in prepared texts often target the factual details of a text (L1 type of questions) without considering the other levels of comprehension which are equally important (particularly at the higher levels).

Below is a table matching levels of reader comprehension to some suggestions for question types related to the indicators of ability used in CLB 2012. The table may help in planning and prevent focusing on simple question types or asking questions that are too difficult. You will notice that at Stage One, comprehension questions are mostly at the Literal and Interpretative level. In CLB Stages 2 and 3, comprehension questions should include all three levels depending on the type of text and the purpose for reading/listening.

**Remember**: It is important to make sure that there is a match between the indicators of ability /criteria and the actual question asked e.g., if the criteria is to compare information, the task or question should actually require readers to do that and not just focus on main idea and detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL ONE</th>
<th>LITERAL LEVEL</th>
<th>Some examples of question starters</th>
<th>CLB document: Stage 1 (Level 1-4). (Refer to CLB 2012 for items in the list that would be appropriate to your level)</th>
<th>CLB document: Stage 2 (Level 5-8) (Refer to CLB 2012 for items in the list that would be appropriate to your level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Getting the information – reproducing what is found/heard in the text | - These questions often start with but are not limited to: *Who…*  
*What…*  
*Where…*  
*When….*  
Thought processes could involve: naming, identifying, defining | - Identify facts, items, details  
- Locate/find details, key information  
- Recognize X  
- Follow instructions  
- Find X  
- Identify sequence & location signals  
- Recognize common sentence patterns, phrases, symbols | - Identify key details, key information  
- Locate information  
- Follow instructions, directions  
- Retell X |

Adapted from Vacca and Vacca, 1986. Content Area Reading, 2nd Ed. Little, Brown and Co.
### Handout 6.2: LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION AND QUESTION TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL TWO</th>
<th><strong>INTERPRETIVE LEVEL</strong></th>
<th>Some examples of question starters</th>
<th>CLB document: Stage 1 (Level 1-4). (Refer to CLB 2012 for items in the list that would be appropriate to your level)</th>
<th>CLB document: Stage 2 (Level 5-8) (Refer to CLB 2012 for items in the list that would be appropriate to your level)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
|           | Integrating information and making inferences - seeing the relationship between the ideas found in the literal level | - These questions could start with:  
  *Why...*  
  *How...*  
  *In what way...*  
  *What is the main idea...*  
  *Compare...*  
  *Contrast...*  
  *What could cause...*  
  Thought processes could involve: integrating, inferring, explaining, stating relationships, comparing, contrasting, summarizing | - Identify or understand purpose, layout, type of text  
  - Get the gist  
  - Identify overall meaning  
  - Find main idea  
  - Interpret graphics  
  - Interpret meaning of individual words  
  - Indicate politeness and tone  
  - Identify type and purpose  
  - Compare facts/information/ simple information  
  - Identify meaning of connective words | - Identify implied meaning, reader/writer relationship, mood, attitude of writer, context, register, style, purpose, attitude, intent  
  - Interpret sequence and location signals  
  - Summarize  
  - Identify main idea & key details  
  - Identify layout and organization to find information needed  
  - Identify organization of text and links between paragraphs  
  - Interpret sequence and location signals and implied meaning to infer correct sequence  
  - Find and use information  
  - Get the gist  
  - Distinguish fact/opinion  
  - Compare information  
  - Infer correct sequence  
  - Follow sequences of narrative or processes  
  - Locate and integrate relevant information  
  - Present information in a chart or some other format |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL THREE</th>
<th>APPLIED LEVEL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using information from the text to construct knowledge (express opinions and form new ideas based on information in text)</td>
<td>- These questions could start with:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Predict…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Imagine …</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Based on what you have read/hear how might…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What is your opinion/ What do you think about…support your opinion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What are some possible consequences …</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Explain/defend…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thought processes could involve: judging, evaluating, defending choices, predicting, hypothesizing, interpreting</td>
<td>- Use facts to plan or make a decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Compare facts/opinions to make a choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<td>- Find and use information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Compare facts to make choices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Identify information to make a decision, determine appropriate info, evaluate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluate ideas to draw conclusions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluate ideas, compare with own opinions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Find and integrate information for comprehension and use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Analyze information, supporting details implied meanings and writer’s point of view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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