

The Technique of Previewing, Predicting, and Inferring: Activating Comprehension

Previewing, predicting, and inferring are a set of interconnected **active reading techniques** used to prime the reader's mind, enhance focus, and build deeper understanding *before, during, and after* reading. Think of them as the three phases of engaging with a text to go beyond the literal words on the page.

Definition and Purpose

Previewing

Definition: A rapid inspection of a text's structure and main features (titles, headings, visuals) to get a general overview of the content. **Purpose:** To activate prior knowledge and create a **mental framework** for the incoming information.

Predicting

Definition: Using preview information and existing knowledge to formulate specific expectations or questions about the text's content. **Purpose:** To transform passive reading into an **active, goal-driven inquiry** and set a reading target.

Inferring

Definition: The process of using **textual evidence** (clues) combined with **prior knowledge** to draw logical conclusions that are not explicitly stated by the author. **Purpose:** To achieve a **deeper level of comprehension** by understanding underlying meaning, author bias, and implications.

The core purpose of all three techniques is to transform passive reading into an active process, thereby dramatically improving comprehension and retention.

Methodology: How to Engage with a Text Effectively

1. Previewing and Predicting (Before Reading)

- **Examine Structural Features:** Look at the **Title** and **Subtitle** to grasp the main topic. Scan the **Headings** and **Subheadings** to map the organization. Read the **Introduction** for the thesis and the **Conclusion** for the summary. Note **Visuals** (charts, images) and **bold** terms.
- **Formulate Predictions:** Convert headings into questions. Ask, "What do I already know about this topic?" and "What specific information will the author use to support their main point?"

2. Making Inferences (During and After Reading)

- **Identify Clues:** Actively look for specific details, word choices, descriptions, or patterns of evidence provided by the author. These are the *hints* or *data points*.
- **Connect to Background Knowledge:** Combine the author's clues with your own experience, facts, and understanding of the world.
- **Draw a Conclusion:** Formulate a logical conclusion or meaning that ties the clues to your knowledge. This is the **inference**—a reasoned guess or interpretation of the author's message.

Optimal Applications

These techniques are essential for all academic and professional reading, but they are particularly valuable when:

- **Reading Lengthy or Complex Material:** Previewing helps break the text down, and inferring allows you to understand complex relationships between ideas.
- **Evaluating Argumentation:** Inferring helps you identify an author's assumptions, tone, or underlying biases, which are often not stated directly.
- **Answering High-Level Comprehension Questions:** Moving beyond the literal *who*, *what*, *where* (which is scanning territory) to address the *why* and *how* of a topic.

Example Scenario

Imagine you are reading an editorial on climate policy titled "**Costly Delays: A Failure to Act.**"

- **Previewing:** You check the source and title. You see the title is "Costly Delays: A Failure to Act" in a leading business journal.
- **Predicting:** You predict the article will argue that inaction on climate change is damaging to the economy and will likely suggest market-based solutions.
- **Inferring:** As you read, the author repeatedly uses words like "inefficiency," "market failure," and "missed opportunities." You know these are terms used by free-market economists. **Inference:** You infer that the author's underlying perspective is rooted in **free-market economics**, even though they never explicitly stated their economic philosophy.

References for Further Study

- Pauk, W., & Owens, R. J. (2020). *How to Study in College* (12th ed.). Cengage Learning. (A foundational text for study skills that provides detailed instructions on effective reading techniques.)

- Rayner, K., Schotter, E. R., Masson, M. E., Potter, M. C., & Treiman, R. (2016). *So Much to Read, So Little Time: How Do We Read, and Can Speed Reading Help? Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 17(1), 4-34. (A research-based article that offers scientific context on reading processes.)
- The Academic Skills Center. (Various University Resources). (Often provides practical, self-help guides on active reading strategies and information retrieval.)

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