Woody Allen, the noted film director, actor, writer, and comedian isn’t joking when he declares that you have to read to survive, especially in this day and age. The ability to read—and read well—for a variety of purposes has taken on unprecedented importance for human beings in the twenty-first century. Today’s students are tomorrow’s adults. As they enter the adult world, the expectation to read and write will be greater than in any other time in human history. The Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association asserts in its position statement that tomorrow’s adults “will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn” (1999, p. 3).

Although Woody Allen may have had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek when he declared that reading isn’t fun, he was right on the mark when he declared that reading is indispensable. Reading matters.

The real value of reading lies in its uses. Reading, as we will see, is a powerful means of communication. It involves putting language to

All teachers play a critical role in helping students comprehend and respond to information and ideas in text.
use purposefully—whether it is to enjoy and, yes Woody, to have fun; or whether it is to imagine, to solve problems, or to learn by clarifying and sharpening our thinking about a subject.

All too often students give up on reading with the expectation that teachers will impart information through lecture and recitation. When students become too dependent on teachers as their primary source of information, they are rarely in a position to engage actively in reading to learn. This need not be the case. As the organizing principle of this chapter underscores: All teachers play a critical role in helping students comprehend and respond to information and ideas in text.

Study the chapter overview for the chapter. It's your map to the major ideas that you will encounter in the chapter. The graphic display shows the relationships that exist among the concepts you will study. Use it as an organizer. What is the chapter about? What do you know already about the content to be presented in the chapter? What do you need to learn more about?

In conjunction with the chapter overview, take a moment or two to study the “Frame of Mind” questions. This feature uses key questions to help you think about the ideas that you will read about. Our intent is to create a mental disposition for learning, a critical “frame of mind,” if you will, so that you can better interact with the ideas that we, as authors, have organized and developed in the chapter. When you finish reading, you should be able to respond fully to the “Frame of Mind” questions.

Response Journal
Write a “five-minute essay” in your response journal on your initial reaction to the organizing principle.
The classroom is a crucible, a place where the special mix of teacher, student, and text come together to create wonderfully complex human interactions that stir the minds and spirits of learners. Some days, of course, are better than others. The things that you thought about doing and the classroom surprises that you didn’t expect fall into place. A creative energy imbues teaching and learning.

Sometimes, however, lessons limp along. Others simply bomb—so you cut them short. The four or so remaining minutes before the bell rings are a kind of self-inflicted wound. Nothing is more unnerving than waiting for the bell to ring when students don’t have anything meaningful to do.

Consider a science teacher’s reflection on the way things went in one of her classes. “Something was missing,” she explains. “The students aren’t usually as quiet and passive as they were today. Excuse the pun, but the chemistry wasn’t there. Maybe the text assignment was too hard. Maybe I could have done something differently. Any suggestions?” This teacher, like most good teachers, cares about what she does. She wants to know how to improve her craft. She knows that when the chemistry is there, teaching is its own reward.

Good teachers bring sensitivity and a spirit of reflective inquiry to their teaching. They care about what they do and how they do it. As Elliot Eisner (1985) aptly put it:

Teaching can be done as badly as anything else. It can be wooden, mechanical, mindless, and wholly unimaginative. But when it is sensitive, intelligent, and creative—those qualities that confer upon it the status of an art—it should, in my view, not be regarded, as it so often is by some, as an expression of unfathomable talent or luck but as an example of humans exercising the highest levels of their intelligence. (p. 77)
Being an Artful Teacher

Although texts are routinely assigned in content area classrooms, helping students to learn how to learn with texts enters into the plans of teachers only infrequently. Teaching and learning with texts are challenges in today’s classrooms where the demands inherent in the teaching of content standards can easily lead to “covering” information without much attention given to how students acquire important concepts and details.

No Child Left Behind Act

In January of 2002 President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which represents the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. There are several strong provisions of NCLB related to standards-based education, high-stakes testing, and teacher quality, which undoubtedly will impact what teachers do in the classroom and how they do it. The issue of teacher quality, for example, is an important aspect of the NCLB legislation, but the concept of what it means to be a highly qualified teacher is quickly becoming one of the most controversial aspects of NCLB. Essentially, NCLB defines a “highly qualified teacher” as someone with a strong academic background in a subject area, but not necessarily someone who enters the teaching profession with certification. Although this definition may indeed widen the pool of teaching candidates, many of these potential teachers “will not know how to work effectively with students. They will not know how to package and deliver their subjects in ways that increase student learning” (Kaplan & Owings 2003, p. 688).

Figure 1.1 depicts the results of a recent national poll on teacher quality conducted by the Educational Testing Service (Hart & Teeter 2002). Interestingly, only 19 percent of respondents believed that it was important for teachers to have “a thorough understanding of their subject.” Yet, 42 percent of those surveyed indicated that it was important for teachers to have “skills to design learning experiences that inspire/interest children,” and 67 percent believed that “developing the proper skills to make information interesting and understandable is a greater difficulty than developing adequate knowledge about subject matter.”

According to Kaplan and Owings (2003):

Overwhelmingly, Americans believe that knowing how to teach is at least as important as knowing what to teach. High quality teaching—knowing the material and how to convey it—makes the difference in student achievement. Research supports this view. (p. 687)

A strong attraction to academic content is one of the reasons teachers are wedded to a particular discipline. Yet, it is much more difficult to teach something than merely to know that something: “The teacher of the American Revolution has to
know both a great deal about the American Revolution and a variety of ways of communicating the essence of the American Revolution to a wide variety of students, in a pedagogically interesting way” (Shulman 1987, p. 5). What to teach and how to teach it are nagging problems for classroom teachers. For some, using texts to teach content contributes to the problem. For others, showing students how to learn with texts is part of the solution.

Learning with Texts

Why does reading matter? Why bring students and texts together in the classroom? Texts, after all, are but one medium for learning academic content. Although we’re not suggesting that texts are the only source for learning or that they should be, they will continue to be indispensable tools for constructing knowledge; sharing the experiences, ideas, and feelings of others; and developing new insights and perspectives. Learning how to teach with texts contributes signifi-
significantly to the way you think about teaching, learning, and curriculum. Throughout this book, we invite you to examine content area teaching practices, and the assumptions underlying those practices, in the light of promising strategies for text learning and active student engagement.

All too often, academic texts are viewed as sacred canons, authoritative sources of knowledge by which the information in a field is transmitted from generation to generation of learners. The expression “learning from texts” has been used widely in content area reading, as if a text were indeed a canon to be mastered rather than a tool for learning and constructing meaning. The proposition from suggests a one-way act in which meaning flows from A (the text) to B (the reader). The shift in meaning from from to with is subtle but dramatic (Tierney & Pearson 1992). It places the act of reading to learn squarely in the context of a human transaction between two parties rather than being a transmission of information from one party to another. Learning with texts suggests that readers have much to contribute to the process as they interact with texts to make meaning and construct knowledge.

Although texts come with the territory, using them to help students acquire content doesn’t work well for many teachers. Teaching with texts is more complex than it appears on the surface. Whether you’re a novice or a veteran teacher, using texts effectively requires the willingness to explore instructional strategies and to move beyond assigning and telling.

BeyondAssigningandTelling

Think back to when you were in school—how were you taught? Your own personal history as a student, we wager, has etched into your memory an instructional blueprint that teachers in your past probably followed: Assign a text to read (usually with questions to be answered) for homework; then, in subsequent lessons, tell students through question-and-answer routines what the material they read was about, explaining the ideas and information that the students encountered in print. The dominant interactional pattern between teacher and students during the class presentation of assigned material often involves calling on a student to answer a question, listening to the student’s response, and then evaluating or modifying the student’s response (Alvermann & Moore 1991). Such is the ebb and flow of assign-and-tell instructional routines in content area classrooms.

There is more to teaching with texts than assigning and telling. Assigning and telling are common but uninspired teaching practices that bog students down in the mire of passive learning. Assign-and-tell, more often than not, dampens active involvement in learning and denies students ownership of and responsibility for the acquisition of content. Teachers place themselves, either by design or by circumstance, in the unenviable position of being the most active participants during classroom interactions with students.

No wonder John Goodlad (1984) portrays textbook assignment, lecture, and recitation (a form of oral questioning in which teachers already know the answers to the questions they ask) as the dominant activities in the instructional repertoire
of many content area teachers. Goodlad and his research associates conclude from a monumental study of schools that “the data from our observations in more than 1,000 classrooms support the popular image of a teacher standing in front of a class imparting knowledge to a group of students” (p. 105). His team of researchers found that the prevalence of assign-and-tell practices increases steadily from the primary to the senior high school years and that teachers often “outtalk” students by a three-to-one ratio.

Try to recall what it was like when you were in school. Well-intentioned teachers, more likely than not, assigned texts to be read as homework, only to find that for one reason or another many of the students didn’t quite grasp what they were assigned to read. Some didn’t read the material at all. Others read narrowly, to answer questions assigned for homework. Still others may have got tangled in text, stuck in the underbrush of facts and details. So class time was spent transmitting information that wasn’t learned well from texts in the first place.

When teachers impart knowledge with little attention to how a learner acquires that knowledge, students soon become nonparticipants in the academic life of the classroom. Assign-and-tell practices not only result in passive reading but also influence the way students view themselves in relation to texts. The accompanying “Calvin and Hobbes” cartoon has Calvin thinking of himself as “informationally impaired.”

Teaching with texts requires its fair share of strategy. But it involves more than assigning pages to be read, lecturing, or using questions to check whether students have read the assigned material. To use texts strategically, you must first be aware of the powerful bonds that link literacy and learning across the curriculum.
Understanding Literacy

For many years the term content area reading was associated with helping students better understand what they read across the curriculum. However, the concept of content area reading has been broadened in recent years to reflect the integration of communication processes (reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing) as students engage in text-related learning. Hence, the relatively new term content literacy refers to the ability to use reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing to learn subject matter in a given discipline (Vacca 2002). Literacy is a strong cultural expectation in the United States and other technologically advanced countries. Society places a heavy premium on literate behavior and demands that its citizens acquire literacy for personal, social, academic, and economic success. To better understand what it means to be content literate in an academic subject, examine the general construct of the term literacy and how it is used in today’s society.

Literacy is a term whose meaning fluctuates from one context to another. It may, for example, be used to describe how skillful and knowledgeable a person is in a particular subject. What do you know about computers and how to use them? Are you computer literate? In the same vein, the term cultural literacy refers to what an educated person should know about the arts, literature, and other determinants of culture.

The most common use of the term literacy has been to denote one’s ability to read and write a language. In the past century, the term has undergone variations in meaning. It has been used to depict the level of competence in reading and writing—functional literacy—that one needs to survive in society; one’s lack of education—illiteracy—manifested in an inability to read and write a language; and one’s lack of a reading habit—aliteracy—especially among those who have the ability to read and write but choose not to.

The more researchers inquire into literacy and what it means to be literate, the more complex and multidimensional the concept becomes. Literacy is situational. In other words, a person may be able to handle the literacy demands of a task in one situation or context but not in another. Hence workplace literacy refers to the situational demands placed on workers to read and write effectively (Mikulecky 1990). These demands vary from job to job.

Literacy Is Situational

Reading is as situational in the content areas as it is in the workplace, where the demands placed on a reader will vary from subject matter to subject matter. Suppose you were to accompany Darryl, a sophomore at Warren Harding High, through a typical school day. Toward the end of his first-period U.S. history class, where the students have been studying the events leading up to the Bay of Pigs invasion during John F. Kennedy’s presidency, the teacher calls on Darryl to read aloud to the class a textbook section describing Fidel Castro’s overthrow of the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista:
Latin America was a special target for aid from the United States because the Soviet Union had recently gained a foothold there. In 1959 an uprising led by Fidel Castro succeeded in overthrowing the Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Many Americans applauded Castro’s success, believing he would bring democracy to Cuba. Castro, however, quickly established a Communist-style dictatorship with strong ties to the Soviet Union.

When Kennedy took office, a plan to overthrow Castro was already in the works. The plan called for an invasion of Cuba by a group of anti-Castro Cuban refugees trained and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Kennedy gave the green light for the plan to proceed. (Boyer & Stuckey 1996, pp. 491–492)

Darryl reads the text quickly, completing the reading just as the bell rings. He grabs his stuff from the desk and hurries off to biology, where the class has been involved in a study of microorganisms. Fifteen minutes into the lesson, the teacher reinforces a point she is making during her lecture by asking Darryl to read about euglenoids:

The euglenoids, members of phylum Euglenophyta, are protists that have traits of both plants and animals. They are like plants because they contain chlorophyll and undergo photosynthesis. However, euglenoids have no cell walls. Instead of a cell wall, euglenoids have a layer of flexible, interlocking protein fibers inside the cell membrane. Euglenoids are similar to animals because they are responsive and move by using one or two flagella for locomotion. Euglenoids have a contractile vacuole that expels excess water from the cell through an opening. They reproduce asexually by mitosis. (Biggs, Emmeluth, Gentry, Hays, Lundgren, & Mollura 1991, p. 275)

Darryl navigates his way through the euglenoid passage, occasionally faltering on words like flagella as he reads. When asked to tell the class what the passage is about, he gropes for a word or two: “I dunno. Eugenoids [sic] or something.” His teacher manages a smile, corrects the pronunciation of euglenoids, and proceeds to explain what Darryl read to the class.

Mercifully, the period ends. Darryl heads for algebra 2, his favorite class. The teacher assigns students to read this passage on an alternative definition of a function:

Since a function has the property that exactly one second component is related to each first component, an alternative definition of a function is the following. A function is a rule that associates with each element of one set exactly one element of another set.

Functions are often denoted by letters, such as f, g, and h. If the function defined by the rule \( y = 2x \) is called \( f \), the following “arrow notation” can also be used to define the function:

\[
 f: x \rightarrow 2x
\]

This is read “\( f \) is the function that associates with a number \( x \) the number \( 2x \).” (Dolciani, Graham, Swanson, & Sharron 1992, p. 84)

Darryl handles the task with more purpose and confidence than he exhibited in the reading tasks from the previous classes. Why? you might wonder.
Darryl's scenario illustrates how demanding it is to switch gears from content area text to content area text. What demands do the various texts place on Darryl's ability to read? What demands does the task—reading aloud to the class—place on Darryl? What other factors besides the nature of the text and of the task are likely to affect his content literacy?

**Influences on Content Literacy**

As you might surmise, a variety of classroom-related factors influence content literacy in a given discipline, some of which include

- The learner’s prior knowledge of, attitude toward, and interest in the subject;
- The learner’s purpose for engaging in reading, writing, and discussion;
- The language and conceptual difficulty of the text material;
- The assumptions that the text writers make about their audience of readers;
- The text structures that writers use to organize ideas and information; and
- The teacher’s beliefs about and attitude toward the use of texts in learning situations.

Shifting the burden of learning with texts from teachers’ shoulders to students’ is in large measure what this book is about. Yet learning with texts is all the more challenging in today’s classroom where the emphasis is on standards-based learning and high-stakes assessment. The pressure to teach in a standards-based curriculum can easily lead to intense content coverage that focuses on what students are to learn at the expense of how they will learn information and concepts in a content area. What then becomes the teacher’s responsibility in balancing content (the “what” of instruction) and process (the “how” of instruction) in the content areas?

**Incorporating Content Standards into Literacy-Based Instruction**

In April of 1983, *A Nation at Risk*, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, called for widespread educational reform to stem what the commission identified as “a rising tide of mediocrity” in U.S. education. The report claimed that the United States had to reform the way it educates its children and adolescents to maintain its competitive edge in world markets with other industrialized nations such as Japan, Germany, and South Korea. Although *A Nation at Risk* advanced the position that Americans were too poorly educated to compete globally, it was not without its critics who claimed that the “crisis” in education is more manufactured than real based on an analysis of the commission’s findings (Berliner & Biddle 1995; Bracey 2003). Regardless of whether one
disagrees with the findings of *A Nation at Risk*, the report has led to a series of federal initiatives in the past two decades that have provided the impetus for what has become known as the “standards movement” in U.S. education.

Since the onset of the standards movement, federal initiatives have shifted from providing equal access to education for everyone to the quality of that education, especially as quality relates to curriculum content and student achievement. Standards, in a nutshell, are expected academic consequences defining what students should learn at designated grade levels and in content areas. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a proliferation of national, state, and local standards that provide a road map to what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and for each content area.

**Why Have Standards?**

The underlying rationale for the creation of standards is that high learning expectations—clearly stated and specific in nature—will lead to dramatic increases in student achievement. With high learning expectations comes an accountability system based on “high-stakes” assessment to determine how well students meet the standards formulated in each content area. Some states, such as Florida, California, and Texas, tie high-stakes assessment to the threat of grade-level retention for students who perform below predetermined levels of proficiency in critical areas such as reading. We explore in more detail the nature of high-stakes assessment in Chapter 2.

**Pressures on Teachers**

In a high-stakes educational environment, standards are bound to increase the pressure for teachers as well as students. In order for standards-based instruction to be effective in improving student performance, it needs to be aligned with the curriculum. As a result, numerous states have developed content standards, and school districts have subsequently redesigned their curricula so that it is consistent with the content area and grade-level standards outlined by the state.

The pressure to teach content standards well is omnipresent for many teachers. Yet teaching content well means helping students discover and understand the structure of a discipline (Bruner 1961). The student who discovers and understands a discipline’s structure will be able to contend with its many detailed aspects. From an instructional perspective, teachers must help students see the “big picture” and develop the important concepts and powerful ideas that are part of each subject.

Teachers who are wedded to a discipline walk a tightrope between content and process. It is certainly a balancing act every time the attempt is made to influence what is learned and how it should be learned. Someone once said that teaching a set of ideas without regard to how students are to acquire those ideas is like blowing air into a punctured balloon. The effort is futile.
Balancing Content and Process

Many of the instructional strategies and practices you will learn about in this book will help you teach students to understand the structure of your discipline and the important ideas and information underlying the subject matter that you teach. Balancing content and process in a standards-based curriculum means at the very least

- Knowing the content standards for your content area and grade level;
- Making instructional decisions based on authentic assessments throughout the school year about students’ abilities to use reading and writing to learn; and
- Integrating content literacy strategies into instructional plans and units.

To become literate in a content area, students must understand how to use reading, writing, viewing, and talking to learn. Integrating these communication processes helps students to better understand what they are reading about, writing about, talking about in classroom discussion, or viewing on a computer screen or video monitor. Using literacy-based learning strategies doesn’t require specialized training on the part of content area teachers. And the pursuit of content literacy does not diminish the teacher’s role as a subject matter specialist. To help students become literate in a content area does not mean to teach them how to read or write or talk as might be the case in a reading or English classroom. Instead, reading, writing, talking, and viewing are tools that learners use to comprehend texts in content areas.

Text Comprehension in Content Areas

The story of Olaudah Equiano, an African slave who lived in the 1700s, illustrates what reading is all about. Equiano kept a diary that eventually was published as a book called *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. His book was first published in London in 1789 and was later abridged and edited by Paul Edwards (1967). Equiano tells how he was kidnapped from his West African tribe as a child and sold into bondage to a ship’s captain, how he educated himself, and how he eventually purchased his freedom. In his diary, Equiano describes the rather strange and mysterious activity that his master engaged in whenever he read books on long voyages across the seas. Although Equiano didn’t know how to read, he was in awe of the relationship that his master had with books.

What was this thing that his master called reading? Equiano longed to be able to read books the way his master did. So when he was alone in his captain’s cabin, he would pick up a book, open it, and begin talking to it. Then he would put his
ears near the pages of the book in hopes that the book would talk back to him. But the book remained silent. Equiano felt helpless in the presence of the silent text. Reading remained a mystery to him until he learned to read and write.

Much to his credit, Equiano was on the right track when he picked up a book and started talking to it in hopes that it would talk back to him. One way to think about reading is to liken it to a conversation between two parties. Reading involves a conversation between the reader and the text author. An author creates a text to communicate ideas to someone else. Readers engage in the conversation so that they can comprehend and perhaps even question and challenge the author’s ideas. No wonder reading has been described as a skillful activity in which the reader’s mind is alive with questions. Skilled readers often aren’t even aware that they are raising questions while reading, because reading has become an automatic process—an activity that is second nature to the skilled reader. These questions allow readers to interact with the content of the communication: What is this text about? What is the author trying to say? What is going to happen next? What does the text mean? So what? Such questions help the reader anticipate meaning, respond to the text, search for information, and infer from and elaborate on the content of the text.

Developing Research-Based Comprehension Strategies

When skilled readers have difficulty comprehending what they are reading, they often become strategic in the way they approach challenging and difficult text. That is to say, good readers have developed strategies that they use to understand what they are reading. As Duke and Pearson (2002) explain, we know a great deal about what good readers do when they read: “Reading comprehension research has a long and rich history . . . much work on the process of reading comprehension has been grounded in studies of good readers” (p. 205). Table 1.1 delineates what good readers do when they engage in the process of comprehending text.

The research-based findings of two recent influential reports, *The Report of the National Reading Panel* (National Reading Panel 2000) and the *RAND Report on Reading Comprehension* (RAND Study Group 2002), indicate that much is known about comprehension instruction. These reports, for example, draw several conclusions about effective comprehension instruction, including the following:

- Instruction can be effective in helping students develop a repertoire of strategies that promotes and fosters comprehension.
Strategy instruction, when integrated into subject matter learning, improves students’ comprehension of text.

Struggling readers benefit from explicit instruction in the use of strategies.

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to text comprehension and is especially important in teaching English language learners.

Effective comprehension strategies include question generation; question answering routines; comprehension monitoring; cooperative learning; summarizing;
visual displays known as **graphic organizers**; and knowledge of different **text structures**.

- Students benefit from exposure to different types or **genres** of texts (e.g., informational and narrative texts).
- Teachers who provide choices, challenging tasks, and collaborative learning experiences increase students’ motivation to read and comprehend texts.

Learners position themselves to comprehend texts whenever they use **prior knowledge** to construct meaning for new material that they are studying. Prior knowledge reflects the experiences, conceptual understandings, attitudes, values, skills, and strategies a student brings to a text learning situation. Let’s take a closer look at the role prior knowledge plays in comprehending and learning with text.

**Prior Knowledge and Comprehension**

In workshops for content teachers, we occasionally read the short story “Ordeal by Cheque” by Wuther Crue (first published in *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1932). The story is extraordinary in that it is told entirely through the bank checks of the Exeter family over a twenty-eight-year span. The workshop participants interact in small groups, and each group is assigned the task of constructing the meaning of the story. At first glance, the groups don’t know what to make of their task. “You must be kidding!” is a typical response. At this point, we engage the groups in a **prereading activity** to activate prior knowledge, declare the purposes for reading, and arouse interest in the story. We assign them the activity in Table 1.2, which depicts in chart form the essential bits of information contained on the first nine checks of the story. Group members collaborate as they respond to the task of answering the three questions that accompany the chart: What is the story about? How would you describe the main characters? What do you think will happen in the remainder of the story? We invite you to analyze the information in the chart. Are you able to construct what has taken place so far in the story? What inferences did you make about the characters?

Your predictions and inferences are probably rooted in your “knowledge of the world” as well as your knowledge of how stories work. Some of you, for example, may have used your knowledge of **story structure** to infer a setting for “Ordeal by Cheque” and identify a problem around which the remainder of the story will unfold. Based on the information in Table 1.2, what appears to be the problem of the story? The fifteen or so minutes that it takes to complete the prereading activity is time well spent. Not only have you developed a general sense of what the story is about but also your curiosity and interest may have been aroused about the content of the remaining checks in the story.

Not only do readers activate prior knowledge **before** reading but they also use prior knowledge **during** and **after** reading to infer meaning and elaborate on the text content. You will find this to be the case as you read “Ordeal by Cheque” in...
its entirety on pages 16–19. As you read, you will undoubtedly find yourself using your knowledge of the world as well as what you know (or think you know) about the characters, the historical era in which the story is set, and the plot to make inferences, to evaluate, and to elaborate on the story content. Why is this the case?

**Schemata**

Cognitive scientists use the technical term *schema* to describe how people use world or prior knowledge to organize and store information in their heads. Furthermore, *schema activation* is the mechanism by which people access what they know and match it to the information in a text. In doing so, they build on the meaning they already bring to a learning situation. Indeed, schemata (the plural of schema) have been called “the building blocks of cognition” (Rumelhart 1982) because they represent elaborate networks of information that people use to make sense of new stimuli, events, and situations. When a match occurs between students’ prior knowledge and text material, schema functions in at least three ways:

First, schema provides a framework for learning that allows readers to *seek* and *select* information that is relevant to their purposes for reading. In the process of searching and selecting, readers are more likely to *make inferences* about the text. You make inferences when you *anticipate* content and *make predictions* about upcoming material, or you *fill in gaps* in the material during reading.

### Prereading Activity for “Ordeal by Cheque”

Here are the essential bits of information contained in the first few checks of the story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry date</th>
<th>Paid to:</th>
<th>Amount:</th>
<th>Signed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/30/03</td>
<td>A baby shop</td>
<td>$148.50</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2/03</td>
<td>A hospital</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/3/03</td>
<td>A physician</td>
<td>475.00</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/19/03</td>
<td>A toy company</td>
<td>83.20</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/6/09</td>
<td>A private school for boys</td>
<td>1,250.00</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18/10</td>
<td>A bicycle shop</td>
<td>52.50</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/26/15</td>
<td>A military academy</td>
<td>2,150.00</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/3/21</td>
<td>A Cadillac dealer</td>
<td>3,885.00</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/7/21</td>
<td>An auto repair shop</td>
<td>288.76</td>
<td>Lawrence Exeter Sr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the story about? How would you describe the main characters? What do you think will happen in the remainder of the story?
Ordeal by Cheque

Los Angeles, Calif.  Aug 8th, 08

Hollywood State Bank 90-534
821 Santa Monica Boulevard

Pay to the order of__

Moses Indum, Baby Driver $45.50

One hundred Forty eight _50_ DOLLARS

Lawrence Exeter

Los Angeles, Calif.  Aug 22nd, 08

Hollywood State Bank 90-534
821 Santa Monica Boulevard

Pay to the order of__

Columbia Military Academy $150.00

Twenty one hundred fifty _50_ DOLLARS

Lawrence Exeter Sr.

Los Angeles, Calif.  Sept 2nd, 08

Hollywood State Bank 90-534
821 Santa Monica Boulevard

Pay to the order of__

Hollywood Hospital $100.00

One hundred _00_ DOLLARS

Lawrence Exeter

Los Angeles, Calif.  Sept 21st, 08

Hollywood State Bank 90-534
821 Santa Monica Boulevard

Pay to the order of__

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Hollywood State Bank 90-534
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Pay to the order of__

Mary Daisy Windsor $25,000.00

Twenty five thousand _00_ DOLLARS

Lawrence Exeter Sr.
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Second, schema helps readers organize text information. The process by which you organize and integrate new information into old facilitates the ability to retain and remember what you read. A poorly organized text is difficult for readers to comprehend. We illustrate this point in more detail when we discuss the influences of text structure on comprehension and retention in later chapters.

Third, schema helps readers elaborate information. When you elaborate what you have read, you engage in a cognitive process that involves deeper levels of insight, judgment, and evaluation. You are inclined to ask, “So what?” as you engage in conversation with an author.

Not only do students engage in cognitive thinking as they read but they also respond to text on an affective level. Reader response helps to explain why students react to what they read with both thought and feeling as they engage in comprehending text.

**Reader Response**

Reader response theory has evolved from a literary tradition. As early as 1938, Louise Rosenblatt (1982) argued that thought and feeling are legitimate components of literary interpretation. A text, whether it is literary or informational, demands affective as well as intellectual responses from its readers. Creating an active learning environment in which students respond personally and critically to what they are reading is an important instructional goal in a response-centered classroom. Often in text-learning situations, a teacher will focus on what students have learned and how much. There is value in having what Rosenblatt calls an efferent stance as a reader. When readers assume an efferent stance, they focus attention on the ideas and information they encounter in a text. Reader response, however, is also likely to involve feelings, personal associations, and insights that are unique to the reader. When students assume an aesthetic stance, they shift attention inward to what is being created as part of the reading experience itself. An aesthetic response to text is driven by personal feelings and attitudes that are stirred by the reader’s transactions with the text.

One way to encourage comprehension is to take advantage of both efferent and aesthetic stances. This works well when students actively respond to what they are reading not only by talking but also by writing. One of the instructional strategies we explore in Chapter 11, on writing to learn, is the use of response journals. When students combine the use of response journals with discussion, the challenge from an instructional perspective is to create an environment in which they feel free enough to respond openly. Open response is necessary to evoke students’ initial feelings and thoughts. Evoking students’ initial responses to a text is crucial to further exploration of the ideas they are encountering. Open responses, however, are not final responses.

For example, a history teacher divides the class into two groups and has one group read *Bearstone* (1989), by Will Hobbs, and the other read *The Cage* (1986), by Ruth Sender. These trade books have protagonists who are being held against their will in situations that are beyond their control. As the students read the books, they keep response journals in which they react to questions such as how
the protagonists feel as captives of societies that discriminate against their race. When the class meets to discuss the books, students offer ideas from their response journals to generate a comparison concerning the ways in which the Jewish woman’s captivity in *The Cage* during World War II differs from the contemporary Native American boy’s sense of belonging in *Bearstone*. From this discussion, students go on to explore the concept of slavery and how it changes across circumstances, societies, and historical periods.

Affect, as you can see, is a catalyst for students to respond to text. Bleich (1978) suggests that response involves both the author and the reader taking active parts in the making of meaning. Thus, the initial response of “I like this” or “I hate this” becomes the springboard for other, more complex reactions. Why a student likes or does not like a text becomes the genesis of discussions, drama, art, and compositions that probe the reader’s intentions.

*Reader response questions* allow students to explore their personal responses and to take those initial reactions into more analytic realms. According to Brozo (1989), the rationale behind a reader’s response to text is this: “It is through a personal connection that a text becomes meaningful and memorable” (p. 141). Following are some questions that evoke student responses to informational texts:

1. **What aspect of the text interested you the most?** (The reader identifies an idea, issue, event, character, place, or any other aspect of the content that aroused strong feelings.)

2. **What are your feelings and attitudes about this aspect of the text?** (The reader describes and explains feelings and attitudes.)

3. **What experiences have you had that help others understand why you feel the way you do?** (The reader supports feelings and attitudes with personal connections.) (Brozo 1989, p. 142)

Responses to these questions help readers consciously connect their own experiences to the content of the text. The questions can be used well in combination with writing and talking.

*Study a student’s response to a trade book titled* *Atoms, Molecules, and Quarks* (1986), by Melvin Berger, presented in Figure 1.2. Students can and do become interested in informational text when it is presented in a response-centered format.

When students are faced with challenging text, they benefit from instructional routines and strategies that engage them in a process of responding to meaning at different levels of understanding. Often teachers rely on a variety of *question answering* routines and *question generation* strategies to encourage students to think about what they read at different levels of comprehension.

**Levels of Comprehension**

Because reading is a thoughtful process, it embraces the idea of levels of comprehension. Readers respond to meaning at various levels of abstraction and
conceptual difficulty (Herber 1978). Figure 1.3 shows the different levels of comprehension.

At the literal level, students read the lines of the content material. They stay with print sufficiently to get the gist of the author’s message. In simple terms, a literal recognition of that message determines what the author says. Searching for important literal information isn’t an easy chore, particularly if readers haven’t matured enough to know how to make the search or, even worse, haven’t determined why they are searching in the first place. Most students can and will profit greatly from being shown how to recognize the essential information in the text.

Knowing what the author says is necessary but not sufficient in constructing meaning with text. Good readers search for conceptual complexity in material. They read at the interpretive level—between the lines. They focus not only on what authors say but also on what authors mean by what they say. Herber (1978) clarifies the difference between the literal and interpretive levels this way: “At the literal level readers identify the important information. At the interpretive level readers perceive the relationships that exist in that information, conceptualizing the ideas formulated by those relationships” (p. 45).

The interpretive level delves into the author’s intended meaning. How readers conceptualize implied ideas by integrating information into what they already know is part of the interpretive process. Recognizing the thought relationships

### FIGURE 1.2 Reader Response Questions for Atoms, Molecules, and Quarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Most Interesting Part of Text</th>
<th>The information about quarks was good. It was something that I didn’t know before. I really thought that the names of the different types of quarks (up, down, truth, beauty, strange, and charm) were kind of weird, but these names made them easier to remember because they are so different.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Feelings and Attitudes toward Subject</td>
<td>The author did a good job in making all of this interesting and pretty easy to read. Quarks and their flavors and colors are kind of hard to understand when you read about them in the textbook, but I could follow this book. I think it’s amazing what scientists have been able to find out about atomic particles. I especially wonder about why the universe hasn’t blown up already, because the book said that it should have because of the way particles and antiparticles react. Scientists don’t have the answer either. But it makes you feel a little uneasy, not knowing what holds all of this together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Personal Associations</td>
<td>I suppose that all of us have wondered about what keeps the universe going at some time or other. I guess what started me thinking about this was a science fiction movie I saw that showed the world exploding into outer space. A lot of people see these kinds of shows and wonder if that could really happen. Then, when you read about quarks, it makes you think.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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that the author weaves together helps readers make inferences that are implicit in the material.

For example, study the following passage, which is organized according to cause–effect relationships. Figure 1.4 shows how a cause combines with several effects to form a logical inference that is implicit in the text passage.

As part of an experiment, young monkeys were taken away from their mothers when they were born and each was raised in complete isolation. When these monkeys were brought together for the first time, they didn't want to play with each other as monkeys usually do. They showed no love for each other. And in fact they never learned to live together. It seemed that living apart from their mothers and from each other from the very beginning had some unusual side effects on these growing monkeys.

From time to time throughout this chapter, you have probably been trying to read us—not our words but us. And in the process of responding to our messages,
you probably raised questions similar to these: “So what? What does this information mean to me? Does it make sense? Can I use these ideas for content instruction?” Your attempt to seek significance or relevance in what we say and mean is one signal that you are reading at the applied level. You are reading beyond the lines.

Reading at the applied level is undoubtedly akin to critical reflection and discovery. It underscores the constructive nature of reading comprehension. Bruner (1961) explains that discovery “is in its essence a matter of rearranging or transforming evidence in such a way that one is enabled to go beyond the evidence so reassembled to additional new insights” (p. 21). When students respond to text at the applied level, they know how to synthesize information—and to lay that synthesis alongside what they know already—to evaluate, question the author, think critically, and draw additional insights and fresh ideas from content material.

Questioning

Using the levels of comprehension model helps teachers engage students in instructional routines that revolve around question answering and question generation. Many students do not know how to answer questions or how to make inferences. Others find it difficult to generate their own questions about text (National Reading Panel 2000). Yet orchestrating classroom discussions without asking questions is like gardening without using a hoe or a spade. Imagine a classroom without questions. It is no exaggeration to suggest that teachers often talk in questions (Dillon 1983). When they are used as tools to guide reading comprehension at different levels, questions help students not only to recall factual information but also to integrate information and put it to work for them—to make inferences, to reflect on what they have read, to make judgments, or to invent new ways of looking at the text material.

In their review of reading comprehension instruction, Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest

We know much about the effect of asking different types of questions on students’ understanding and recall of text, with the overall finding that students’ understanding and recall can be readily shaped by the types of questions to which they become accustomed. . . . If students receive a steady diet of factual detail questions, they tend, in future encounters with text, to focus their effort on factual details. . . . If, by contrast, more general or more inferential understanding is desired, teachers should emphasize questions that provide that focus. When students often experience questions that require them to connect information in the text to their knowledge base, they will tend to focus on this more integrative behavior in the future. (p. 222)

The type of question asked to guide comprehension should be based on the information readers need to answer the question. Therefore, teachers must help students become aware of likely sources of information as they respond to questions (Pearson & Johnson 1978).
A reader draws on two broad information sources to answer questions: information in the text and information inside the reader’s head. For example, some questions have answers that can be found directly in the text. These questions are \textit{textually explicit} and lead to answers that are “right there” in the text.

Other questions have answers that require students to think about the information they have read in the text. They must be able to search for ideas that are related to one another and then put these ideas together in order to answer the questions. These questions are \textit{textually implicit} and lead to “think and search” answers.

Still other questions require students to rely mainly on prior knowledge and experience. In other words, responses to these questions are more inside the reader’s head than in the text itself. These questions are \textit{schema-based} and lead to “author and you” and “on your own” answers.

“Right there,” “think and search,” “author and you,” and “on your own” are mnemonics for the levels of comprehension discussed previously. These mnemonics signal question–answer relationships (Raphael 1982, 1984, 1986). Many kinds of responses can be prompted by textually explicit questions, by textually implicit questions, and by schema-based questions. However, the success that students experience when responding to a certain type of question depends on their ability to recognize the relationship between the question and its answer. In Chapter 3, we explore in more detail how students can be taught to be more strategic in their awareness and use of question–answer relationships.

The insights into comprehending text presented here are developed in succeeding chapters within the framework of instructional strategies related to content literacy. What these insights tell the classroom teacher is this: Learners must “work” with print in an effort to explore and construct meaning. Reading is first and foremost a conversation, a give-and-take exchange, between the reader and the text. However, the burden of learning is always on the reader. There are times when a text may be too difficult for students to handle on their own. In situations where text is difficult, teachers are in an ideal position to guide students’ reading through various forms of instructional activity. \textit{Scaffolding} learning with texts, then, is a primary responsibility of the teacher—one that we also explore throughout this book.

\section*{Scaffolding Instruction}

When texts serve as tools for learning in content area classrooms, teachers have a significant role to play. That role can be thought of as “instructional scaffolding.” One of the benchmarks of content-literate students, as we suggested earlier, is that they know how to learn with texts independently. Yet many students in today’s diverse classrooms have trouble handling the conceptual demands inherent in text material when left to their own devices to learn. A gap often exists between the ideas and relationships they are studying and their prior knowledge, interests, attitudes, cultural background, language proficiency, or reading ability. In a nutshell, instructional scaffolding allows teachers to support students’ efforts to make sense of texts while showing them how to use strategies that will, over time, lead to independent learning.
Used in construction, scaffolds serve as supports, lifting up workers so that they can achieve something that otherwise would not have been possible. In teaching and learning contexts, scaffolding means helping learners to do what they cannot do at first (Bruner 1986). Instructional scaffolding provides the necessary support that students need as they attempt new tasks; at the same time, teachers model or lead the students through effective strategies for completing these tasks. Providing the “necessary support” often means understanding the diversity that exists among the students in your class, planning active learning environments, and supporting students’ efforts to learn through the use of instructional strategies and texts beyond the textbook—all of which are explored more closely in the chapters that follow.

Looking Back

In this chapter, we invited you to begin an examination of content literacy practices, and the assumptions underlying those practices, for text learning and active student involvement. Teachers play a critical role in helping students realize a potentially powerful use of language: learning with text. Learning with text is an active process. Yet assigning and telling are still common teaching practices and often have the unfortunate consequence of dampening students’ active involvement in learning. In today’s standards-based educational environment, the pressure to teach content standards well can easily lead to an emphasis on content-only instruction with little attention paid to how students acquire information and develop understandings. Teachers must balance content and process as they engage students in comprehending text.

Comprehending texts is what content area reading is all about. Instead of teaching students how to read or write, we use reading, writing, viewing, and talking as tools to construct knowledge—to discover, to clarify, and to make meaning—in a given discipline.

Content literacy, then, underscores the situational demands placed on students to use communication processes to learn subject matter. Content teachers are in an ideal position to show students how to use the learning strategies that are actually needed to construct content knowledge.

Perhaps the single most important resource in learning with texts is the reader’s prior knowledge. Therefore, we explored some of the influences and processes underlying reading to learn in content classrooms. In particular, we emphasized the roles that prior knowledge, reader response, and levels of comprehension play in thinking with text.

Instructional scaffolding is a concept used throughout this book. Instructional scaffolding supports text learners in achieving...
literacy tasks that would otherwise be out of reach.

In the next chapter, we explore another dimension of standards-based curriculum as we shift our attention to different forms of assessment in the content area classroom. Concern about assessment is one of the major issues in education in the United States today. What role do standardized “high-stakes” assessments play in the lives of classroom teachers? How do authentic forms of assessment inform instructional decisions? How can teachers use portfolios and make decisions about the texts they use? The key to assessment in content areas, as we contend in the next chapter, is to make it as useful as possible. Let’s find out how and why this is the case.

Minds On

1. Review the passages read by Darryl in U.S. history, biology, and algebra 2 class. In small groups, create lists of the varying situational demands that each text selection places on Darryl’s ability to read. Discuss possible factors besides the nature of the text and of the task that are likely to affect his content literacy. How are Darryl’s attitude and willingness to be an active learner affected by these factors? What might the teachers of these various classes have done to create a more student-centered learning experience?

2. Focus on the elements of a student-centered curriculum. Obviously, the teacher’s beliefs and instructional approach play a large role in permitting students to become actively involved in an ongoing lesson, but what visible signs of student involvement would exist in the physical environment of the classroom? Just by looking, would it be possible to detect a classroom where student-centered lessons are the norm? If so, what physical evidence would be present, and what would that evidence indicate to you, the observer?

3. Select a popular book, film, or song that most members of your small group know. Discuss each of the following levels of comprehension communicated in that work: (a) literal (in the lines), (b) interpretive (between the lines), (c) applied (beyond the lines).

4. Some teachers believe that because literal comprehension is necessary to answer “higher-level” questions, it is unnecessary to ask literal-level questions. Do you agree? Do you think we would agree?

5. Imagine that during lunch, several teaching colleagues comment that because many students in their courses “can’t read,” these teachers rarely use books. They argue that students learn content just as well through audiovisual aids and discussions.

Divide a small group of six class members into two smaller groups of three: one representing the teachers who believe books are unnecessary and one representing those who believe books are essential.

For ten minutes, role-play a lunchtime debate on the pros and cons of using reading in content areas. After the time has elapsed, discuss the arguments used by the role players. Which did you find valid, and with which did you disagree?

6. Your supervisor observes a lesson in which you use a large block of time for students to read. Afterward, the supervisor says that you should assign reading as homework, rather than “wasting” valuable class time. She adds that if you continue with lessons
like this, your students will be lucky to finish one or two books over the entire year. Consequently, you request a meeting with the supervisor. What arguments might you bring to this meeting to help convince her of the validity of your approach?

**Hands On**

1. With a small group, examine the following well-known passage and attempt to supply the missing words. Note that all missing words, regardless of length, are indicated by blanks in the passage.

   Besides, Sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God, who presides over the destinies of nations, who will raise up friends to fight our ______ for us. The battle, Sir, is not to the strong alone: it is to the vigilant, the active, the ______. Besides, Sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest.
   
   There is no ______, but in submission or slavery. Our chains are forged. Their ______ may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come—I repeat, Sir, let it come! It is in vain, Sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, “Peace! Peace!” But there is no peace. The war has actually begun!
   
   The next gale that sweeps from the North will bring to our ears the clash of resounding ______! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that the Gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so ______, or peace too ______, as to be purchased at the price of chains and ______? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what ______ others may take, but as for me, give me ______ or give me death!

   After you have filled in the blanks, discuss the processes by which decisions on possible responses were made and any problems encountered. How did prior knowledge of the passage’s topic assist your reading process? (After you have completed this experiment, review Patrick Henry’s speech at the end of the “Hands On” section in Chapter 4.)

   In what ways was your experience similar to that of a student who attempts to decipher a content passage but who has little background knowledge of its content?

2. Bring the following materials to class: a large paper bag, five paper plates, four buttons, three cardboard tubes, scraps of material, six pipe cleaners, three sheets of construction paper, scissors, tape, and a stapler. Your instructor will silently give each group a written directive to create a replica of a living creature (cat, dog, rhinoceros, aardvark, etc.) with no verbal communication permitted.

   After your group has constructed its creature, list the communication difficulties, and discuss how each was overcome. Finally, have a spokesperson from each group share these difficulties with the rest of the class.

3. Rewrite Lewis Carroll’s poem “Jabberwocky” using “real” words.

   **Jabberwocky**
   
   ‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
   All mimsy were the borogoves,
   And the mome raths outgrabe.

   “Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
   The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
   Beware the Jubjub bird and shun
   The frumious Bandersnatch!”

   He took his vorpal sword in hand:
   Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

Compare your efforts with those of other members of your small group, and discuss the following questions:

a. Why are there differences in the translations?

b. Does your translation change the intended meaning of the poem?

c. Do the differences affect your enjoyment of the poem?

d. What personal experiences and prior knowledge that you brought to your reading of the poem may have influenced your translation?

Go to Chapter 1 of the Companion Website (www.ablongman.com/vacca8e) and click on Activities to complete the following tasks:

1. Complete the story map outline for “Ordeal by Cheque” based on your reading of the story.

2. Think about a highly abstract concept, such as dream (www.dreamtree.com) or universe (www.handsonuniverse.org), and go to the Websites devoted to the topics. Bring a physical object to class that represents the concept. Verbally report your criteria for choosing the object to your class.

Go to the Companion Website (www.ablongman.com/vacca8e) for suggested readings, interactive activities, multiple-choice questions, and additional Web links to help you learn more about the importance of reading.