

TEACHER GUIDE H

FOCUS on

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

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INTRODUCTION

What is the **FOCUS** series?

FOCUS is a reading-strategy practice series. Each student book in the series provides brief instruction and concentrated practice for students in one targeted Reading Strategy. *FOCUS* also allows students the opportunity for self-assessment of their performance. It allows teachers the opportunity to identify and assess a student's level of mastery.

6 Reading Strategies featured in the *FOCUS* series:

- Understanding Main Idea and Details
- Understanding Sequence
- Recognizing Cause and Effect
- Comparing and Contrasting
- Making Predictions
- Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences

The *FOCUS* series spans 8 reading levels (1.0–8.9). The reading passages in each book are designed so that the book can be used by all students performing at that reading level. The reading passages in each book progress from low to high along that reading level range.

Book	Reading Level
Book A	1.0–1.9
Book B	2.0–2.9
Book C	3.0–3.9
Book D	4.0–4.9
Book E	5.0–5.9
Book F	6.0–6.9
Book G	7.0–7.9
Book H	8.0–8.9

What is Comparing and Contrasting, the Reading Strategy featured in this *FOCUS* book?

Comparing and contrasting is finding how two or more things are alike and/or different. A comparison tells how two or more people (appearance, behavior, feelings, attitudes, etc.), places, objects, or events are alike. A contrast tells how they are different. Clue words often signal comparisons and contrasts. Some comparison clue words are *both, same, like, alike, also,* and *similar*. Some contrast clue words are *but, unlike, different, however, whereas, in contrast,* and *instead*.

What is in each student book?

There are 48 student books in the *FOCUS* series. There is one student book for each of the 6 Reading Strategies, at each of the 8 reading levels. Each student book contains:

- *To the Student*
This introduces the program and should be read and discussed with students to make sure they understand what they are to do in the book.
- *Table of Contents*
- *Learn About (Modeled Practice)*
These two pages provide basic instruction and modeling in the understanding and application of the Reading Strategy. The Learn About should be read and discussed with students to make sure they understand the Reading Strategy. Additional tips for helping students understand and use the Reading Strategy are included in the Reading Strategy Tips for the Teacher on pages 12–13 of this teacher guide.
- *Lesson Preview (Guided Practice)*
These two pages include a sample reading passage and two selected-response questions with explanations of why each of the eight answer choices is correct or not correct. The Lesson Preview should be read, worked through, and discussed with students to make sure they understand how to answer strategy-based questions.
- *20 Lessons (Independent Practice)*
Each two-page lesson contains one reading passage, four strategy-based selected-response questions, and one strategy-based constructed-response writing question.

Reading Passages: The reading passages progress across the reading level. The passage genres include:

—**Fiction:** personal narrative, realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy fiction, mystery, folktale, fable, legend

—**Nonfiction:** report, article, interview, letter, postcard, book report, movie review, diary entry, journal entry, biography, textbook lesson, directions, instructions, recipe, invitation, announcement, experiment

Selected-response questions: In each lesson, students apply the Reading Strategy to a reading passage and then choose the correct answers for four selected-response (multiple-choice) strategy-based questions. You should model how to answer these kinds of questions using information on the Lesson Preview pages.

Constructed-response writing questions: In each lesson, students apply the Reading Strategy to a reading passage and then write a short response to a strategy-based question. You should model how to answer these kinds of questions by using one of the sample answers provided on pages 28–29 of this teacher guide.

- *Tracking Chart*
Students use this chart for noting their completion of and performance in each lesson.
- *Self-Assessments*
These five forms allow students the opportunity for self-assessment of their performance.
- *Answer Form*
Students may use this form to record their answers to the eighty selected-response questions and to indicate that they have answered each of the twenty constructed-response writing questions.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the research upon which the *FOCUS* series is based. The full research report for this title may be downloaded from the Research Internet page at <http://www.curriculumassociates.com/research>.

- Introduction to the Series
- How Is *FOCUS* Supported by Research on Struggling Readers, Including English-language Learners?
- Why Are These Reading Strategies Important for Reading Comprehension?
- How Does Research Support the Assessments Found in *FOCUS*?

Introduction to the Series

FOCUS is a series designed for on-level readers who need repeated practice, for struggling readers, and for English-language learners (ELL). This reading-strategy series provides practice for students who are reading at grade level one and above. *FOCUS* centers on brief instruction and concentrated practice with targeted reading strategies. The series focuses on the higher-order reading strategies that struggling readers need extensive help with. This series gives struggling readers practice in comprehending what they have read. The selections in the series span curriculum content areas. Each student book has twenty reading selections with which students can practice a specific reading strategy. Each selection is followed by comprehension questions that require students to apply the focused reading strategy. In addition, students can further their comprehension experience by responding to a constructed-response question that follows each selection.

The design of the reading selections and the comprehension questions is based on research from several areas. *FOCUS* is supported by current research regarding reading instruction of English-language readers and struggling readers.

How Is *FOCUS* Supported by Research on Struggling Readers, Including English-language Learners?

Much of the research on effective instruction for struggling readers parallels the National Reading Panel instructional recommendations. Practice in activating prior knowledge, self-monitoring, and the use of graphic elements (Siegel, 2001) are also supported by research-based strategies for struggling readers. Additional research-based instructional strategies for struggling readers are also included in *FOCUS*. Researchers have shown that struggling readers have a crying need for extensive practice with reading strategies. “Almost 40 percent of fourth graders read below the basic level” (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 2005).

Why are English-language learners considered struggling readers? National test results explain why: “Hispanic students as a whole, including English-proficient children in the second generation and beyond, score significantly lower in reading than other students. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003), which excludes children with the lowest levels of English proficiency from testing, only 44% of Latino fourth graders scored at or above the ‘basic’ level, in comparison to 75% of Anglo students. Only 15% of Latino fourth graders scored at ‘proficient’ or better compared to 41% of Anglos” (Slavin & Cheung, 2003, p. 1). While ELL students face obvious challenges to

improve their reading scores, research-based teaching instructions are available. “. . . [W]ith allowances for the language issues themselves, effective reading instruction for English language learners may be similar to effective instruction for English-proficient children, whether the ELLs are first taught in their native language or in English” (Slavin & Cheung, 2003, p. 30).

FOCUS is a program that is comprehensive in its use of effective learning and teaching strategies for on-level and struggling readers:

	Learn About	Lesson Preview	Lessons
Explicit Instruction	x	x	
Extensive Reading and Genre Exposure	x	x	x
Scaffolded Instruction			
Modeled (Think Aloud)	x	x	
Guided (Cooperative Learning)		x	x
Independent	x	x	x
Cooperative Learning	x	x	x
Previewing	x	x	
Clue Word Instruction	x		
Graphic Organizer	x	x	

Explicit Instruction

FOCUS uses explicit instruction in the teaching of the reading strategies. The explicit instruction occurs in the Learn About section and the Lesson Preview section. Researchers Manset-Williamson and Nelson (2005) explain, “. . . explicit instruction involves the overt, teacher-directed instruction of strategies, including direct explanation, modeling, and guided practice in the application of strategies” (p. 62). “The explicitness with which teachers teach comprehension strategies makes a difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students (modeling and careful scaffolding is key)” (Abadiano & Turner, 2003, p. 76). Through the Lesson Preview section, students receive explicit instruction consisting of a definition, a short example passage, clue words if appropriate, and a usage rule for the reading strategy.

Additionally, *FOCUS* is a perfect vehicle for struggling readers because it does not overwhelm students with the presentation of information. “. . . [B]rief, well-organized, tightly written texts are used to introduce the strategy, because readers are more capable of using the strategy initially with ‘small segments of well-organized text that contain explicit ideas and relations’ ” (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1996, p. 615). In the Learn About lesson, students initially experience the reading strategy in a short paragraph, usually three to seven sentences long. A Remember box text feature is a point of reference for students to use while attending to lessons. The Remember box is consistently placed in each book of the series. Struggling or novice readers usually skip or gloss over text features, which are valuable comprehension tools. With repeated exposure and external prompting by the teacher, students learn to pay attention to the text feature.

Extensive Reading and Genre Exposure

Through the *FOCUS* series, students have the opportunity to read 960 reading selections that cover both nonfiction and fiction genres. Students, especially in the early grades, are exposed to genres they typically don’t encounter. “When students reach the fourth grade, they are generally expected to begin to read, comprehend, and write informational text, often with no regard for the fact that their primary grade experiences likely included little or no exposure to such texts (Duke, 2000; Christie, 1987)” (Tower, 2003, p. 15). The study and practice of reading fiction and nonfiction genres and their related text structure benefit students’ comprehension. “Introducing young readers to a variety of texts prepares them to deal with more complex texts (and complex issues) in the future (Fisher, Flood, & Lapp, 1999; Snow et al., 1998)” (Barton & Sawyer, 2003, p. 2). “Looking for and using text structure helps students to study and think more deeply about ideas encountered during reading” (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 391). Repeated

practice with each genre and its text structure ensures that students will internalize a genre's characteristics. As students also become more proficient in comprehending a genre and text structure, they become more fluent readers.

"Schools also need to be aware that text availability, in a variety of genres and on a variety of reading levels, is essential to meeting students' varied needs" (Ash, 2002).

Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction benefits all students, including ELL students. The instructional goal in any curriculum classroom is to develop independent learners. "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 . . . 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" (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 25).

Scaffolded instruction is the basic organizational framework of the *FOCUS* series.

Modeled Instruction and Guided Practice

According to Ash (2002) and Flood & Lapp (1990), modeled instruction and guided reading are effective teaching strategies for struggling students. Students who need extensive teacher support benefit from the teacher-directed Learn About lesson and the Lesson Preview section. In the Lesson Preview section, students learn how to progress through the lesson through a variety of methods: teacher-directed, small group, or one-on-one discourse with a teacher or student. Teachers may employ a think-aloud strategy as a means to aid struggling readers. "In think-alouds, teachers make their thinking explicit by verbalizing their thoughts while reading orally" (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 83). Students then experience text-guided instruction as they respond to the reading-strategy questions that follow the reading selection. This guided practice provides experience with the strategy and gives students a feeling of control over the

strategy before they work with a group or independently. As an offshoot of the think-aloud reading strategy, guided practice also makes explicit the reasoning of each answer choice.

Another form of guided practice is the use of cooperative learning, including paired and group work. "English language learners have been found to benefit from instruction in comprehensive reform programs using systematic phonics, one-to-one or small group tutoring programs, cooperative learning programs, and programs emphasizing extensive reading" (Slavin & Cheung, 2003, p. 2).

"Because of the potential value of collaborative student interactions, we underscore the invaluable contribution of cooperative learning in diverse classrooms" (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 150). In *FOCUS*, students are encouraged to work independently at first as they read and answer the questions. Students then meet with partners, or in a small group or a large group of students to discuss their responses. This engagement with peers stimulates learning through multiple senses (speaking, listening, reading, writing), a necessity in order to accommodate for the multiple learning styles that exist in a classroom.

Independent Practice With twenty selections through which to practice a reading strategy, students become independent learners during the course of completing a book. With the help of self-regulation, students will recognize when they have mastered a strategy and then move to a higher reading level of the same strategy or to a different strategy. "Practice gives children opportunities to evaluate their own performances, make corrections, and increase skills" (Morrow, 2003, p. 861). Scaffolded instruction of each reading strategy in the *FOCUS* series provides one of the most effective ways for students to learn and practice the reading strategies.