

Reading for Meaning

What is it?

A tool that promotes close and active reading of assigned texts by having students examine a series of statements, decide whether they agree or disagree with each one, and cite specific evidence to support their positions*

What are the benefits of using this tool?

Both common sense and the Common Core State Standards underscore the importance of preparing students to understand and interpret critical texts. This tool helps us achieve this goal by building the exact types of skills that the Common Core has identified as critical for students' success—skills like reading closely, making inferences, and supporting those inferences with evidence (see Reading Standard 1). Plus, by teaching students to support their positions with evidence and examples (a goal of Writing Standard 1), the tool prepares them to be better writers as well as better readers.

What are the basic steps?

1. Identify a short text or portion of a text that you want students to “read for meaning.” Any kind of text is fine—poem, Internet article, primary document, fable, scene from a play, etc.
2. Generate a list of statements about the text. (Students will ultimately search the text for evidence that supports and/or refutes each statement.)
 - Statements can be true, false, or open to interpretation/designed to provoke debate.
 - Statements can be customized to fit whatever skills, standards, or objectives you're trying to address (e.g., identifying main ideas or interpreting data tables). See Teacher Talk for details.
3. Tell students to preview the statements *before* they begin reading. Ask them to collect evidence that supports or refutes each statement either *as* or *after* they read. Clarify that evidence should include specific words/phrases/details from the text.
4. Have students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement based on the evidence they've collected. (This can be done individually or in pairs/small groups.) If they can't decide, challenge them to rewrite problematic statements in a way that allows for a clear decision.
5. Invite students to share and justify their positions, either as a class or in writing. Help them clarify their thinking, and call their attention to evidence they might have missed or misinterpreted.
6. Use students' responses to evaluate both their understanding of what they've read and their ability to support a statement with textual evidence.


*For more on the Reading for Meaning technique, which is adapted from Harold Herber's Reading and Reasoning Guides (Herber, 1970), see *Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students' Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills* (Silver, Morris, & Klein, 2010) or *The Thoughtful Education Guide to Reading for Meaning* (Silver, Reilly, & Perini, 2009).

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To develop and test students' ability to understand and interpret what they've read
- ✓ To develop and test students' ability to support a position with evidence

EXAMPLE 1: Primary ELA

After listening to the Native American folktale “Turtle Races with Beaver,” second-grade students indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with five statements their teacher had generated. They then drew the evidence that led them to agree or disagree with each statement. The “picture evidence” that one student provided for the statement “Turtle won the race fairly” is shown here:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Turtle won the race fairly. Agree	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			

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EXAMPLE 2: Secondary ELA

An English teacher used this tool to test his students' understanding of a scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Act III, Scene II). A portion of one student's work is shown here:

Evidence for	Statements	Evidence against
The way she talks about Romeo is over the top. Sounds like teenage infatuation: "Take him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heaven so fine, / That all the world will be in love with night, / And pay no worship to the garish sun."	Juliet's soliloquy (lines 1–31) reveals how young and naïve she is.	Her ability to express her love is not childish at all. The language is amazing!
When she finds out Romeo killed Tybalt, she seems conflicted: "Oh that deceit should dwell / In such a gorgeous place." Then she takes Romeo's side and reaffirms her love for him (lines 90–127).	Juliet's attitude toward Romeo changes over the course of the scene.	

SOURCE: Adapted from *Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students' Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills* (p. 14), by H. F. Silver, S. C. Morris, and V. Klein, 2010, Alexandria, VA: ASCD. © 2010 by Silver Strong & Associates. Adapted with permission.

EXAMPLE 3: Secondary mathematics

Math students were told to use their knowledge of probability, as well as information from a reading on the multistate lottery known as Powerball, to support or refute each statement.

Statements	Explanation/Evidence
All you need to calculate your odds of winning is basic multiplication. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	
You have a greater probability of winning the grand prize if you live in a big city than in a small town. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	

SOURCE: Adapted from *Styles and Strategies for Teaching Middle School Mathematics* (p. 52), by E. J. Thomas and J. R. Brunsting, 2010, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. © 2010 by Thoughtful Education Press. Adapted with permission.

EXAMPLE 4: Secondary history

A US history teacher uses this tool to develop and test students’ ability to analyze seminal documents of historical and literary significance (Common Core RI.9–10.9, also RI.11–12.6). One student’s partially completed organizer for Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is shown below.

Statements	Agree or disagree? Support your position with evidence.
The primary goal of the speech was to honor the soldiers who had fought and died.	I <u>disagree</u> since the speech seems to be more a call to action than a memorial. Lincoln charges the living with dedicating themselves to the cause for which the fallen soldiers “gave the last full measure of devotion” and the task of ensuring that “government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”
Lincoln believed that our nation was at a crossroads.	
The style of the speech (in addition to its content) contributes to its power, persuasiveness, and beauty.	
Lincoln believed that the outcome of the war had implications for the entire world, not just the United States.	
Lincoln took his listeners on a journey through time.	

SOURCE: Adapted from *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment* (p. 101), by A. L. Boutz, H. F. Silver, J. W. Jackson, and M. J. Perini, 2012, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ: Thoughtful Education Press. © 2012 by Silver Strong & Associates. Adapted with permission.

EXAMPLE 5: Elementary social studies

A fifth-grade teacher uses Reading for Meaning statements like the ones below to target Common Core Reading Standard 7, which requires students to evaluate content that’s presented visually and/or quantitatively (e.g., via graphs, charts, maps, or data tables).

Statements	Evidence/Calculations																																																																																																																																																				
1. Seattle receives more precipitation in a year than Boston. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree																																																																																																																																																					
2. Over the course of a year, Denver sees more snow than rain. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2"></th> <th colspan="12">Month</th> </tr> <tr> <th>City</th> <th>Avg.</th> <th>JAN</th> <th>FEB</th> <th>MAR</th> <th>APR</th> <th>MAY</th> <th>JUN</th> <th>JUL</th> <th>AUG</th> <th>SEP</th> <th>OCT</th> <th>NOV</th> <th>DEC</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Boston</td> <td>Precip.</td> <td>3.6</td> <td>3.6</td> <td>3.7</td> <td>3.6</td> <td>3.3</td> <td>3.1</td> <td>2.8</td> <td>3.3</td> <td>3.1</td> <td>3.3</td> <td>4.3</td> <td>4.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>21</td> <td>24</td> <td>31</td> <td>40</td> <td>48</td> <td>58</td> <td>65</td> <td>64</td> <td>56</td> <td>46</td> <td>38</td> <td>26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>35</td> <td>37</td> <td>45</td> <td>55</td> <td>66</td> <td>76</td> <td>81</td> <td>78</td> <td>72</td> <td>62</td> <td>52</td> <td>40</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Denver</td> <td>Precip.</td> <td>0.5</td> <td>0.6</td> <td>1.3</td> <td>1.7</td> <td>2.4</td> <td>1.8</td> <td>1.9</td> <td>1.5</td> <td>1.3</td> <td>1.0</td> <td>0.9</td> <td>0.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>16</td> <td>20</td> <td>25</td> <td>34</td> <td>44</td> <td>52</td> <td>58</td> <td>56</td> <td>47</td> <td>36</td> <td>25</td> <td>17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>44</td> <td>46</td> <td>52</td> <td>61</td> <td>70</td> <td>81</td> <td>88</td> <td>85</td> <td>76</td> <td>66</td> <td>52</td> <td>44</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Seattle</td> <td>Precip.</td> <td>5.4</td> <td>4.0</td> <td>3.5</td> <td>2.3</td> <td>1.7</td> <td>1.5</td> <td>0.8</td> <td>1.1</td> <td>1.9</td> <td>3.3</td> <td>5.8</td> <td>5.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>35</td> <td>37</td> <td>38</td> <td>41</td> <td>46</td> <td>51</td> <td>55</td> <td>55</td> <td>51</td> <td>45</td> <td>40</td> <td>35</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>45</td> <td>48</td> <td>52</td> <td>57</td> <td>64</td> <td>68</td> <td>75</td> <td>75</td> <td>68</td> <td>58</td> <td>50</td> <td>45</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Average temperatures recorded in degrees Fahrenheit (°F) Average precipitation amounts recorded in inches (in.)</p>			Month												City	Avg.	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	Boston	Precip.	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.3	3.1	2.8	3.3	3.1	3.3	4.3	4.0	Low	21	24	31	40	48	58	65	64	56	46	38	26	High	35	37	45	55	66	76	81	78	72	62	52	40	Denver	Precip.	0.5	0.6	1.3	1.7	2.4	1.8	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.0	0.9	0.6	Low	16	20	25	34	44	52	58	56	47	36	25	17	High	44	46	52	61	70	81	88	85	76	66	52	44	Seattle	Precip.	5.4	4.0	3.5	2.3	1.7	1.5	0.8	1.1	1.9	3.3	5.8	5.9	Low	35	37	38	41	46	51	55	55	51	45	40	35	High	45	48	52	57	64	68	75	75	68	58	50	45
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4. If you were spending Independence Day in Boston, the temperature would not be above 81°F. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree																																																																																																																																																					

SOURCE: From *Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students’ Comprehension, Reading, and Problem-Solving Skills* (p. 15), by H. F. Silver, S. C. Morris, and V. Klein, 2010, Alexandria, VA: ASCD. © 2010 by Silver Strong & Associates. Reprinted with permission.

Teacher Talk

- ➔ Be creative! Instead of having students read and analyze a single text, have them analyze pieces of art, demonstrations, pairs of texts, or data files. See how one teacher did this in Example 5.
- ➔ Don't assume that students know how to find evidence in a text. Explain, model, and practice this critical skill until students are comfortable with it.
- ➔ If you're having trouble generating statements (Step 2), generate checking-for-understanding questions instead—and then turn those questions into statements. (*Question: Who is the wisest character in this folktale?* → *Statement: The wisest character in this folktale is the grandfather.*)
- ➔ Adapt the tool as needed for developing readers. Primary-grade teachers may want to read their texts aloud (or use picture books), have students search for evidence and complete the organizer as a class, or let students draw their evidence rather than writing it (see Example 1). Scaffold the evidence-gathering process for students until they're capable of doing it on their own.
- ➔ Statements can be designed to fit whatever skills you're addressing (e.g., identifying main ideas or summarizing facts). They can also be designed around any of the Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading—and for literary as well as informational texts (see below for examples).

Anchor-Standard Concepts	Sample Statements
Determine what a text says explicitly. (R.CCR.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is unkind to the ugly duckling. • All isotopes are radioactive.
Make logical inferences from a text. (R.CCR.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can tell that Pooh and Piglet have been friends for a long time. • Without taking Franklin's data, Watson and Crick wouldn't have succeeded.
Identify main ideas and themes. (R.CCR.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The moral of the story is that you should be kind to everyone. • Structure and function are intricately linked.
Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop, connect, and interact. (R.CCR.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After Maxim's revelation, the new Mrs. de Winter is a changed woman. • The seeds of social change for women in America were planted during WWII.
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text; distinguish between what is said and what is meant or true. (R.CCR.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the narrator notes that Della and Jim "most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house," he is expressing disapproval. • The writer's personal feelings influenced his description of this event.
Integrate and evaluate content that is presented visually and quantitatively as well as in words. (R.CCR.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ferdinand is not his usual self in this picture. • According to Table 2 from this article, sun worshippers would be happier living in Phoenix than Seattle.
Evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text. (R.CCR.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author provides sufficient evidence to support his claim. • The argument in Source 1 is stronger than the argument in Source 2.
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or compare the authors' approaches. (R.CCR.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myths from different cultures have similar elements and themes. • The Cherokee people's account of their relocation differs from the account in your textbook.

SOURCE: Adapted from *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment* (p. 102), by A. L. Boutz, H. F. Silver, J. W. Jackson, and M. J. Perini, 2012, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ: Thoughtful Education Press. © 2012 by Silver Strong & Associates. Adapted with permission.