

Power Previewing

What is it?

A tool that prepares students to better handle rigorous texts by teaching them to preview those texts in advance using a specially designed visual organizer

What are the benefits of using this tool?

We want all our students to become more powerful and self-sufficient readers. But what does that mean? Michael Pressley (2006), a leading researcher on reading instruction, tells us that “the conscious processing that is excellent reading begins before reading, continues during reading, and persists after reading is completed” (p. 57). Power Previewing is a tool that’s designed to help every student develop the “conscious processing skills” of proficient readers, with special emphasis on before-reading skills, such as skimming for textual cues, making predictions, and determining how a text is structured. The tool teaches students what to do before they begin reading so that they are better able to understand, remember, and enjoy what they read.

What are the basic steps?

1. Distribute copies of the Power Previewing Organizer for nonfiction texts (p. 106).

Note: This tool was designed with nonfiction texts in mind, but you can use it with works of fiction as well. See Teacher Talk for details; see p. 107 for a fiction-specific organizer.

2. Use sample texts (e.g., articles, textbook passages) to explain and model the Power Previewing steps outlined below. Thoroughly review the “where to look for important information” section of the organizer so that students know where to look and what to pay attention to while skimming.

Prowl for clues: Look for important information as you skim through the text.

Pencil in key information: Record what you learn about the text’s content and organization.

Pry open your memory: Ask yourself if anything in the text looks or sounds familiar.

Personalize the preview: Identify aspects of the text that you find interesting or challenging.

Predict what the text will be about: Use what you learn by skimming to make some predictions.

3. Have students use their organizers to preview a text that you or they select. Intervene as needed to help them make the most of the previewing process. Among other things, you can
 - Ask guiding and focusing questions (e.g., “Do you see any recurring themes in this section?”).
 - Suggest strategies for addressing specific challenges (e.g., vocabulary strategies if challenging terms are the issue or strategies for figuring out what’s important enough to write down).
 - Encourage students to check their predictions when they read the text “for real.”
4. Help students reflect on and learn from the previewing process. See Teacher Talk for ideas.
5. Remind students to use the Power Previewing strategy on their own, not just when you say so. To facilitate the process, post the Power Previewing steps in the classroom and give students copies of blank organizers to keep in their notebooks.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To teach students a strategy that they can use to get more out of rigorous texts
- ✓ To develop active and engaged readers who understand and enjoy what they read

EXAMPLE: The organizer below highlights the different kinds of things that a student might notice and comment on while previewing a nonfiction text (e.g., how the text is organized, recurring terms/ideas, themes with ties to previous units, items in illustrations and sidebars).

<p><i>Where to look for important information:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Titles, headings, and subheadings • Opening paragraphs or introduction • First and last sentence of each paragraph • Summary paragraphs or lists of key points • End-of-chapter or start-of-chapter questions • Bold, italicized, and underlined information • Circled, boxed, or highlighted information • Graphs, figures, tables, charts, and maps • Pictures, cartoons, and photographs • Captions and figure legends 	<p>What are you previewing? What is it about (topic)?</p> <p><i>A textbook chapter. The title/topic is "Civilizations in the Americas."</i></p>
	<p>How is the text structured or organized?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The chapter is broken down into three major sections. Each one focuses on a different geographical region: Mesoamerica, South America, North America.</i> • <i>Within these bigger sections, there are smaller subsections about each individual civilization.</i>
<p>What else did you notice or learn while skimming? What information and ideas seem to be important?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The words "trade," "art," "geography," and "religion" appear in lots of different subsections.</i> • <i>There are lots of pictures and sidebars about art, architecture, religion, and science.</i> • <i>Several section headings and chapter questions focus on how geography impacted the civilizations.</i> 	
<p>Does anything look familiar or relate to something you've seen, read, learned about, or experienced?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We talked about how geography impacts the development of civilizations in our unit on ancient Egypt.</i> • <i>The art in some of the pictures looks like what we saw on our field trip to the museum.</i> 	
<p>What seems interesting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There are some interesting looking ceremonies.</i> 	
<p>What seems confusing or challenging? Do you know any strategies that can help you address these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I might get the different civilizations mixed up. A graphic organizer might help me keep things organized.</i> 	
<p>What predictions can you make and why? (Check and mark the accuracy of your predictions as you read.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There's a lot on art and architecture, so I predict that these civilizations were known for those things.</i> • <i>The word "trade" appears a lot, so I predict that trade was important to all these civilizations.</i> 	

Teacher Talk

- ➔ Help students understand the rationale for using this tool by initiating a conversation about the benefits of skimming through (previewing) a text before actually reading it.
 - Begin by having students describe the purpose of previews they are likely to be familiar with (e.g., movie previews, preseason sports previews, fashion previews in magazines).
 - Ask students why it might be useful to preview texts before reading.
 - Summarize and/or add to students' ideas. You might, for example, point out that knowing how a text is organized can make the information easier to understand and remember—or that generating predictions and personal connections can make reading more interactive and enjoyable.
- ➔ Don't assume the Power Previewing steps are self-explanatory. Explain and model each one thoroughly, making sure to “think aloud” as you work your way through sample texts. Continue modeling the previewing process until students are clear about how to find important information and complete their organizers on their own.
- ➔ In the beginning—or when using the tool with younger students, struggling readers, or English language learners—preview texts as a class and use guiding questions to focus students' attention on what's important. For example, “Does anything on this page look like something we've seen before?” or “Do you notice any words that look different than the others? Why might the author have done that?” Once you've flipped through the entire text, review the questions on the organizer as a class. Have students speak their answers aloud or write (or draw) them on the organizer.
- ➔ Having students highlight the important information that they find while prowling and/or turn in their organizers at the end of the lesson can help you identify individuals who need extra help.
- ➔ Help students reflect on and learn from the previewing process (Step 4) using questions like these: How did you prowl? What did you learn by previewing? How did previewing affect what you paid attention to while reading? Did previewing make the text more enjoyable or easier to understand? Might it be useful to preview texts on your own? Why or why not?
- ➔ Previewing the structure and organization of a text can be as helpful as previewing the content. For this reason, it's a good idea to familiarize students with common text structures (e.g., problem-solution, comparison, cause-effect, claim/evidence, chronological sequence) and encourage them to prowl for those structures as they skim. Reviewing “tip-off words” that signal different kinds of texts (e.g., *first*, *second*, and *finally* for a chronologically or sequentially structured text) can help.
- ➔ If you want students to preview works of fiction instead of nonfiction texts, give them fiction-specific organizers. Use the organizer on p. 107 as is, or modify it as needed to fit your selected text type (e.g., illustrated versus not illustrated, chapter book versus no chapters). Offer students guidance about what to focus on while skimming fiction (e.g., elements like illustrations and chapter titles rather than of end-of-chapter questions and summary paragraphs). You might ask younger students to do a “picture walk” (look at a book's illustrations, describe what they notice, and make predictions based on what they see). You might have older students skim a few paragraphs to get a sense of an author's writing style or use chapter titles to make predictions about overall plot or theme.