

What Are The Systems of Strategic Actions?

While we read books, magazines, blogs, etc., our brains are subconsciously and simultaneously performing a variety of in-the-head actions in order to understand the text in front of us. We notice words we haven't heard before or understood. We form opinions. We predict what might happen next. Word solving, predicting, and critiquing are just three of the twelve Systems of Strategic Actions that are simultaneously happening in our heads while we're processing a text.



Take a moment to look at the image above. Fountas and Pinnell have developed this Systems of Strategic Actions (SOSA) wheel to illustrate the thinking readers are engaged in as they process texts. Whether you're a beginning reader or a seasoned reader, all twelve systems are in use. These cognitive systems are assembled and reassembled in the head as readers move from the easiest texts up a ladder of increasingly difficult texts. The demands of the instructional level text give readers opportunities to learn new ways of problem-solving that in turn builds the processing network.

With appropriate text opportunities and effective teaching, readers will continue to construct their in-the-head processing systems as they move across the grades and into adulthood. Below is a breakdown of these Systems of Strategic Actions.

Thinking Within the Text

Thinking within the text refers to searching for and using information, monitoring and self-correcting, solving words, maintaining fluency, adjusting, and summarizing for purposes and genre of text. By engaging in these strategic actions, readers acquire a literal understanding of the text—"what is happening" or "the facts." "Most of the time, these actions are unconscious. You don't mentally tell yourself, 'Now, I have to search for information.' You just do it when prompted by internal questions. When studying for a test, for example, you might consciously remember details or a summary, but most of the time, you simply understand the text and recall the information automatically. Since you do not need to pay attention to the processing, your mind can be working on something else," (Fountas and Pinnell 2009). As a teacher, you can gather information about the first five systems of strategic actions by observing reading behavior.

Thinking Beyond the Text

Thinking beyond the text means bring your own thinking TO the understanding in a variety of ways. Readers make predictions. They make connections with personal experience, content knowledge, and other texts. They synthesize new information, which requires differentiating between what they already know and adjusting that fund of knowledge to accommodate the new information they encounter in the text. Readers infer what is implied but not stated. “Again, you do not consciously understand these actions; they happen while you are reading. Much of your comprehension of a text comes not from the print itself but from what you bring to the reading. Anyone who has been a member of a book club knows that every person in the group has a slightly different interpretation of the text. These variations in interpretation are quite valuable when they are shared—everyone’s thinking is enriched,” (Fountas and Pinnell 2009). As a teacher you can gain evidence of your students’ ability to think beyond the text by listening to their talk about it and examining their writing.

Thinking About the Text

Thinking about the text means examining it closely and in an analytic way. Readers notice and analyze the writer’s craft and appreciate or criticize something about the writing. “When you say, ‘Amy Tan is one of my favorite writers,’ you are indicating that you like her style, the subjects she writes about, the way she organizes and tells a story, her choice of language, and so on. You are holding up the text as an object to be admired. Similarly, you might question the accuracy or authenticity of a text or be critical of the author’s motives or qualifications. Sometimes analyzing and critiquing are conscious efforts, especially if you plan to talk about the text with others; but just as often, they are unconscious. Proficient readers

think analytically and critically all the time while they are reading,” (Fountas and Pinnell 2009). Evidence of students’ ability to think about the text may be found in their talk and writing.

Through closely observing your students during oral reading, talk, or writing you can see the evidence of their control of all twelve systems. [*The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum*](#) shows you what behaviors you should be noticing and teaching for at each grade or level. Each behavior is categorized into one of the Systems of Strategic Actions, to help teachers make decisions during shared reading, interactive read-aloud, and guided reading lessons, as well as writing about reading.

“The common thread is that most children acquire a fully developed literacy processing system that grows and expands over the years. It is helpful to have in mind a clear picture of what effective readers do as they build their systems so we can think about what all readers need to be able to do,” (Fountas and Pinnell 2009).

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