

# Working Memory Functioning and Its Contribution to Reading Performance

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## DESCRIPTION

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive activity that requires the coordination of multiple mental processes, including decoding, vocabulary access, inference generation, and integration of ideas across sentences. Among these processes, working memory plays a central role in supporting the temporary storage and manipulation of information. In school contexts, differences in working memory capacity among students can lead to noticeable variation in how effectively they understand and retain written material.

Working memory is often described as a system with limited capacity that holds information for short periods while it is being actively processed. During reading, this system is responsible for maintaining previously read words and sentences while integrating them with new input. For example, when a student reads a paragraph, they must remember earlier statements to make sense of later ones. If the working memory capacity is exceeded, earlier information may be lost, leading to fragmented understanding.

Students with higher working memory capacity are generally better able to manage the demands of reading comprehension. They can hold more information in mind, allowing them to connect ideas across longer stretches of text. This ability is particularly important for tasks that require inference, such as understanding implied meanings or drawing conclusions from multiple pieces of information. In contrast, students with lower capacity may struggle to maintain coherence, especially when texts are lengthy or conceptually dense.

Attention control is closely linked to working memory functioning. Students need to focus on relevant information while ignoring distractions, both internal and external. In a classroom setting, distractions may include noise, visual stimuli, or unrelated thoughts. Effective attention control helps maintain information in working memory, supporting continuous comprehension. Students who experience difficulties in attention may find it challenging to sustain the mental representation of a text, leading to gaps in understanding.

Instructional strategies can play a significant role in supporting students with varying levels of working memory capacity. One

approach is to reduce cognitive load by breaking complex texts into smaller segments. This allows students to process information in manageable units before integrating it into a larger structure. Teachers can also use visual aids, such as diagrams or graphic organizers, to support memory by providing external representations of key ideas.

Repetition and rehearsal are additional techniques that can strengthen the retention of information. Encouraging students to summarize what they have read or to discuss it with peers can reinforce memory traces and improve comprehension. These activities require students to actively manipulate information, which supports both working memory and long-term storage.

Vocabulary knowledge interacts with working memory in important ways. When students encounter unfamiliar words, additional cognitive resources are required to infer meaning or consult external sources. This can place extra demands on working memory, reducing the capacity available for integrating ideas. Building a strong vocabulary base can therefore ease the burden on working memory and facilitate smoother comprehension.

Individual differences in working memory capacity may be influenced by developmental factors, educational experiences, and even emotional states. Stress and anxiety, for instance, can interfere with working memory by consuming cognitive resources. In testing situations, students who feel anxious may perform below their actual ability due to reduced capacity for processing information. Creating supportive learning environments can help mitigate these effects.

Assessment practices should take into account the role of working memory in reading tasks. Traditional comprehension tests may not fully capture a student's understanding if working memory limitations interfere with performance. Alternative assessment methods, such as open-book tasks or extended time, can provide a more accurate representation of comprehension abilities.

## CONCLUSION

Working memory capacity is a fundamental factor influencing reading comprehension in school contexts. Its role in maintaining

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**Received:** 22-Sep-2025, Manuscript No. IJSCP-25-41492; **Editor assigned:** 24-Sep-2025, PreQC No. IJSCP-25-41492 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 08-Oct-2025, QC No. IJSCP-25-41492; **Revised:** 15-Oct-2025, Manuscript No. IJSCP-25-41492 (R); **Published:** 22-Oct-2025, DOI: 10.35248/2469-9837.25.12.482

**Citation:** Laurent I (2025). Working Memory Functioning and Its Contribution to Reading Performance. *Int J Sch Cogn Psycho*.12:482.

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and integrating information makes it essential for understanding complex texts. By recognizing the limitations of working memory and implementing supportive instructional strategies, educators can help students improve their comprehension skills and achieve

more effective learning outcomes. Activities that involve memory updating, sequencing, and problem-solving can contribute to strengthening this capacity over time.'