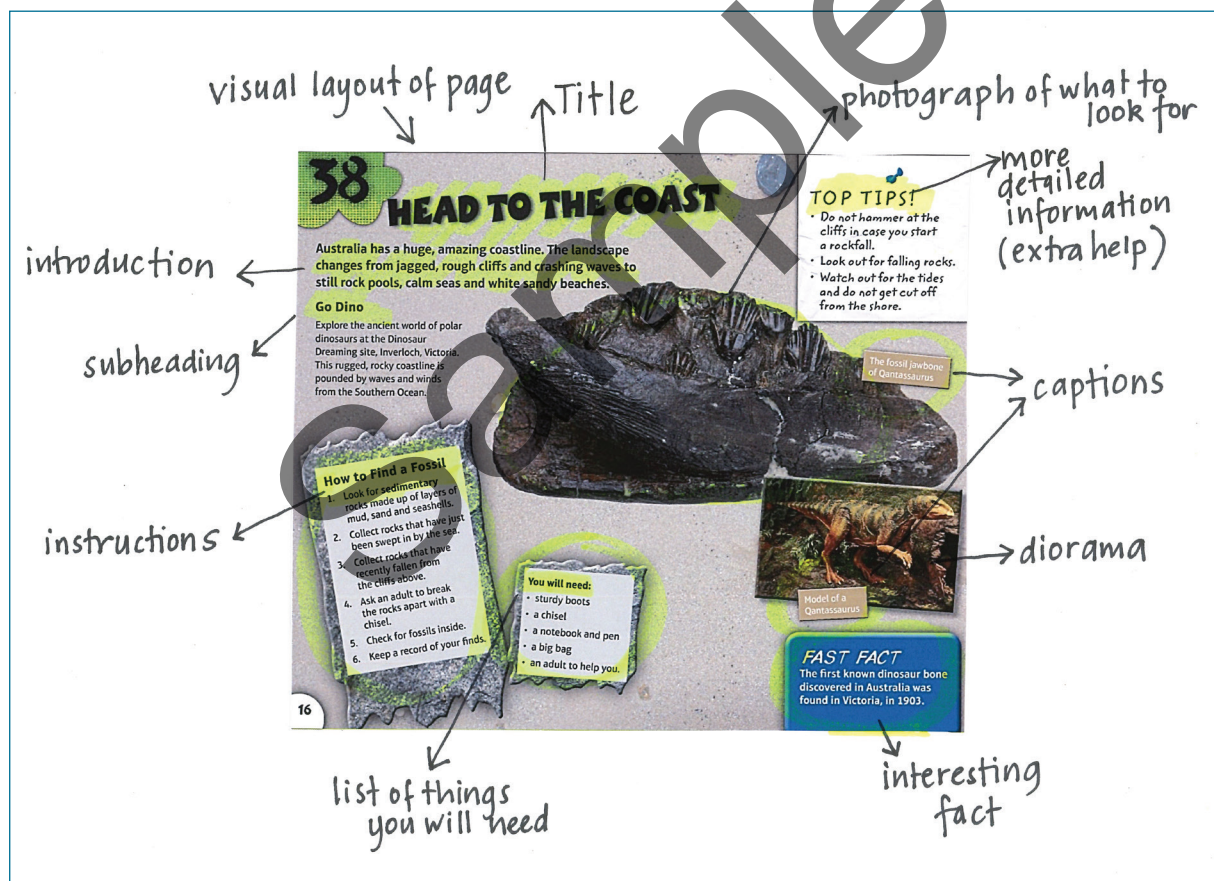


# Teaching text structure and connecting reading and writing

Recent comprehension research highlights the importance of teaching text structure (Pyle et al., 2017). There is strong evidence that when students are familiar with the structure and language features of a particular text type, their comprehension is improved. Understanding the structure of a text before reading reduces the cognitive load on the student and prepares them for what is to come.

Previewing the text and discussing the layout and features of a particular text will help students to organise that information in ways that will support comprehension of that text type. For example, in an article about volcanoes they could notice headings and subheadings, diagrams and labels.

Teaching text structure has a reciprocal relationship with writing. Analysing text structure in reading benefits students in writing. When students are able to write for a purpose and organise their writing for the conventions of a text type, their understanding of the language features of that text type helps them when they are reading that same text type.



A teacher scribes as students notice and share the language features of the instructional text they are about to read. This could be completed as a whole class shared reading lesson or as an introduction to a text in a guided reading group.

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# Student engagement and motivation

Research has identified student motivation and engagement as key factors that impact reading comprehension. Unsurprisingly, students' motivation to comprehend is higher when the texts they read are engaging and of interest to them, and students have a clear goal and purpose for reading them. This is understandable when we think of our own reading choices. Motivation is higher when we are genuinely interested in the topic we are reading about. We don't tend to read what is not of interest to us, and our students are the same!

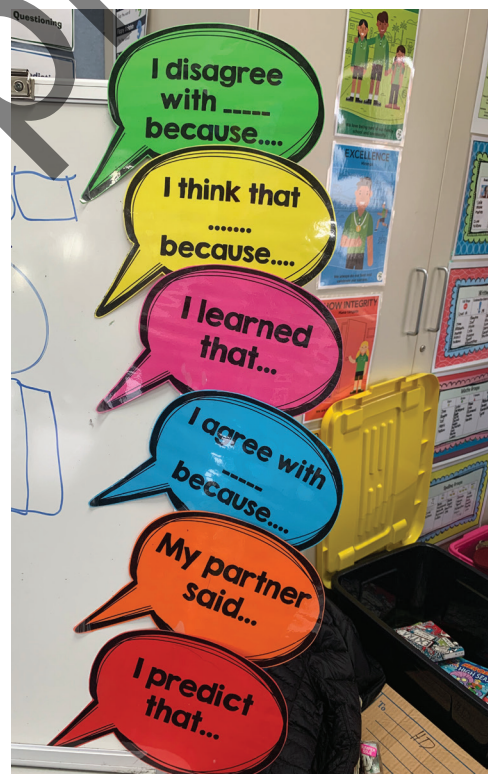
Selecting high-interest texts to teach and practise strategies is important. For older students, I have found using song lyrics to teach strategies works particularly well. Book clubs and reciprocal teaching are independent activities that foster reading comprehension and are enjoyed by many students. Realistically, it is not possible for students to choose their own reading material all the time. However, making links across the curriculum using a range of texts for authentic purposes, and planning activities that include opportunities to collaborate, open-ended tasks where students can make choices and creative responses to texts, will increase motivation and engagement.

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## The importance of talk

Students at all levels need time to process and discuss what they read. Talk is crucial in order to support our students to reach deeper levels of understanding and think critically. Explicitly teaching speaking and listening skills benefits students not only in reading, but across the curriculum. Using the Think, pair, share strategy to increase student talk, asking open-ended questions, really listening to our students and encouraging them to listen to each other will all help facilitate rich discussion. Regularly giving students opportunities to talk in pairs, triads or small groups will provide increased opportunities for thinking and discussion. Talking during reading helps children update their mental model and monitor their understanding and strategy use. It also builds social understanding, and an appreciation of others' points of view.

Remember, talk time is as important as the reading itself, and slowing down and valuing that time will pay dividends. You and your students will enjoy reading more if it doesn't feel like a rush to get through books and reading groups. Learning to read is a journey, not a race!



*A teacher uses sentence starter prompts on a whiteboard to support student talk.*