

What Does It Mean to Be a Proficient Reader?



Reading development is a progression of skills, beginning with the ability to understand spoken language and culminating in the deep comprehension of complex text. Reading development and language literacy are essential to the development of critical thinking skills, and therefore crucial to college and career readiness.

Below are characteristics of proficient and nonproficient readers in grades 6 and above. Familiarity with these characteristics helps educators recognize when students may need additional support to achieve their full potential.

Characteristics of Proficient and Nonproficient Readers

Proficient Readers	Nonproficient Readers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read on or above grade level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often read below grade level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read aloud with accuracy, fluency, and prosody—their oral reading sounds like speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May read aloud with a slow, halting pace and lack of prosody, occasionally misreading, guessing, or skipping words
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are usually good spellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are often poor spellers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have sufficient background and world knowledge, vocabulary, and knowledge of words to understand what they read	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have limited background and world knowledge, vocabulary, or knowledge of words, which affects their understanding of what they read
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have adequate knowledge of grammar, syntax, and organization of texts and written discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have limited knowledge of grammar, syntax, and the organization of texts and written discourse

More Characteristics of Proficient and Nonproficient Readers

Proficient Readers	Nonproficient Readers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the purpose of reading and set appropriate goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often begin reading without a purpose or goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor their reading and know how to “fix” misunderstandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not monitor their reading and don’t “fix” misunderstandings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have reading comprehension that is equal to or better than their listening comprehension for difficult content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have adequate listening comprehension in spite of inadequate word recognition skills and reading comprehension
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make inferences based on what they read	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May struggle to make inferences based on what they read
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand what they read and can think critically about what they have read	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not understand what they read or be able to think critically about what they have read