the shapes herself, she is losing much of the learning. Also, in a multilevel class, students may need to progress at very different rates. It would be helpful to have teaching assistants or partners. (See Appendix G for a lesson on sentence structure for use with *Word Shapes/Sentence Builders*.)

3. Reading Comprehension
When students read haltingly or don’t seem to comprehend or remember what they read, reading is no fun or use to them. To help, we have to do some detective work to find out where the problem lies. The steps to follow are described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding the Problem</th>
<th>Teaching Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can she decode the words?</td>
<td>If not, she probably needs an intensive decoding and syllabication program similar to the one described in the previous section.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is she decoding words slowly, but failing to read fluently enough to grasp the meaning?</td>
<td>If she decodes slowly and has much better listening comprehension than reading comprehension, she may need intensive work with <em>measures that improve fluency</em>. She may benefit from <em>intensive instruction and practice with all cueing systems</em> (syntactic and semantic as well as grapho-phonic) so she can better monitor the accuracy of what she is reading.</td>
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</table>
| Does she decode well and read with some fluency, yet have poor memory or understanding of what she reads? | If so, she may need:  
  - assistance in learning to *visualize* what she is reading  
  - a method of relating what she’s reading to her prior knowledge  
  - a *learning strategy* to help her remember steps in comprehension strategies  
  - a *graphic organizer for understanding how the pieces fit together into the whole*  
  - or several of these strategies |
“My students seem to read well as far as being able to pronounce words; yet, when they are asked to discuss the meaning of the words or sum up what the paragraph means, they draw a blank.”

—Dana Clark

Visualizing to Improve Comprehension

If you read well and enjoy it, you probably have vivid mental pictures of the people and situations you’re reading about. What if, when you read words, no pictures came to mind? Understanding and remembering those words and the meaning of the article or story would be much, much harder. Images and other sensory cues (e.g., descriptions of how something feels or sounds) give us hooks on which we hang meaning and memory. They contribute to the mental frameworks of our prior knowledge and experience that are vitally important to understanding what we read.

If a student finds it difficult to visualize what she is reading, she needs explicit instruction in forming mental pictures of the meaning. To do this ask students to listen, make mental pictures, and describe. Whether a person decodes well or not, she can have difficulty visualizing the meaning of a phrase or passage.

• To strengthen this ability, read aloud to your students: a phrase, a paragraph, poetry, fiction, or a factual account. At first, do very short segments.

“I’ve found that reading comprehension was one of the greatest problems my students faced. They couldn’t seem to process what they read. But when I read to them, they could visualize the story.”

—Charlene Feuchtinger

• Ask them to transfer the words into a mental picture. You may have to help with this at first: “Describe what you ‘see.’ What is the woman wearing? What expression does she have on her face?”

• Model the process of visualizing and retelling. Work with your students to do this, helping them to link the mental image and the retelling.
Building on Prior Knowledge

There are several ways to teach students to build on prior knowledge. *Think alouds* (Gillet and Temple, 1994) and mapping (or webbing) are two strategies that are especially suited for adults with learning disabilities because they use several sensory channels.

**Think alouds:**
- **Teacher modeling:** A *think aloud* is taught quite effectively by the teacher modeling the thinking that accompanies active reading. Explain that you are going to demonstrate an activity that helps you to remember what you’re reading and to understand it better. As you read, connect to prior knowledge, guess, predict, and retell the story (thus far) out loud.

  *Example:* “Oh, this article is about diabetes! That’s what Aunt Barb has. I thought all you had to do was watch what you eat, but she says there’s lots more to it than that. I wonder if this article gives the latest information. It runs in our family, so I’d better learn what I can.”

  *(After reading a couple of paragraphs)* “Well, it’s explained the difference between types of diabetes, and I can tell that Aunt Barb has Type I. But, I didn’t know this! It sounds like I might keep from getting it, at least for a long time, if I keep my weight down. Hmm. I wonder if there’s anything else I can do.” *(reads on)*

Teacher modeling will probably be most effective if it is done as an ongoing teaching strategy. Adults may find this a foreign concept at first and need to be reassured that this is what good readers do!

- **Guided practice as a group:** Explain that you’ll read a selection and periodically stop for them to retell the story so far. A different person may retell each time you stop reading.

- **Guided practice with a partner:** Both partners read a paragraph (or several), then one retells it to the other. Alternate between the two partners. Teacher monitors, helping as needed.

- **Independent practice:** As adult learners are encouraged to do this individually, they may be more comfortable talking just under their breath. Probably the more audible the practice is, the better, since more senses
are involved: speaking and hearing as well as seeing. In the next section, note that the K-W-L strategy is another take on “think alouds,” with the added sensory channel of touch, since the learner is writing.)

**Mapping (or webbing): One tool; many uses!** Mapping is an especially useful tool for any adult with LD. Not only is it useful in accessing prior knowledge for reading comprehension, it is an alternative way of taking notes in a lecture. Further, it is an organizational tool when preparing for writing or a research project. The following map was one actually done by a group of adult learners preparing to learn about AIDS.

The teacher, Margaret Lindop, drew the map as they discussed what they already knew (prior knowledge). In some cases, they put forth “knowledge” that was inaccurate, but these suggestions were recorded. After the map was complete, the teacher asked, “Are there other things that you would like to find out? Are there things here on the map that you would like to check on?” Those things identified were color coded as possible research questions.

As well as being multisensory (speaking, listening, writing, using a graphic), this strategy is quite versatile in its uses. This same activity could be a solid lead-in to reading an article or story about AIDS, to writing an essay relating to AIDS or making a plan for a research project. It could also be revisited after reading an article with the intent of checking for accuracy of information, correcting the map, and using it as a summary note for the article.
Learning Strategies: The two strategies described here, RAP and K-W-L, are samples of many such learning strategies that assist memory, comprehension, approach to task, organization, and other facets of learning.

Before going further, let’s make a connection between chapters. In Chapter 3, Planning, we noted that five curricular options are suggested in *Bridges to Practice:* basic skills, critical content, social skills, self-advocacy, and learning strategies. Learning strategies, then, is an instructional priority for adults with learning disabilities. (See the section on Learning Strategies a bit later in this chapter.).

(Note: The following strategies for use in teaching critical thinking skills, reading skills, and math skills were written by Amanda Keller.)

4. Critical Thinking Skills

**Teaching critical thinking skills with graphic organizers**

Critical thinking skills are related both to reading and to activities in many aspects of life. If a student can master these skills, he or she will be able to apply them in various circumstances.

The critical skills can be taught with graphic organizers to help students visualize the steps in applying the skill. The graphic organizers help students to see how their brains must categorize and break down information in order to understand it. The organizers provide a scaffold from which to work until they internalize the skill.

This is a progressive and structured method of teaching critical skills. Students must master the basic skills in order to comprehend more difficult ones. Skills are taught directly and explicitly from the beginning, with the graphic organizers giving students a foundation on which to stand.
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• **RAP: A Paraphrasing Strategy for Reading Comprehension.** This strategy uses an acronym to help a person remember the steps. (Hollander and Palamar, 1990)
  
  **R** – **Read** a paragraph.
  **A** – **Ask** yourself: “What were the main idea and two details?”
  **P** – **Put** the main idea and details in your own words.

• **K-W-L: A general comprehension strategy that activates prior knowledge, helps in thinking about what a reader wants to know, and summarizes what has been learned.** (Carr and Ogle, 1987)
  
  **K** – **What I already KNOW:** brainstorming ideas
  **W** – **What I WANT to know:** predicting
  **L** – **What I LEARNED:** summarizing

A way to record thoughts is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOW</th>
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<th>LEARNED</th>
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