



ENGAGING STUDENT READERS THROUGH DIGITAL TOOLS

How to equip students with the right options to enhance enjoyment of reading and boost comprehension.

According to [National Assessment of Educational Progress data](#), approximately 70% of students in grades four, eight and 12 read at or above the basic level. That means 30% of US learners are performing below grade level and proficiency.

Part of that is attributable to poor reading skills, but [some experts](#) say that the bigger culprit for most students is insufficient background knowledge. Once students have mastered the crucial skill of decoding, reading comprehension depends almost entirely on underlying understanding. This creates a catch-22. Knowledge is required for successful

reading, and reading is one of the best ways to acquire knowledge.

That's the big advantage to digital content like ebooks and audiobooks. For struggling readers, these formats provide quick, in-context access to relevant background knowledge, like definitions, translations and Read-Alongs, which offer young readers a chance to listen as a story is read, focusing more on comprehension and less on anxiety surrounding the reading process. For reluctant or uninspired readers, digital content brings a huge range of titles and topics to any classroom, ensuring that even the pickiest students will find a text that resonates with them.

CULTIVATING READING ENJOYMENT

[Research shows](#) that students who enjoy tasks like reading are more persistent and more likely to stick with them over time. They pay closer attention, focus more keenly, acquire more knowledge and feel more successful.

Here are four ways to use digital content to meet students' reading needs, foster enjoyment and get them reading more:

1. MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE.

"Digital reading increases access to books," asserts Tiffany Bem, librarian and media specialist at [Rio Rancho Middle School](#) in Rio Rancho, N.M. "Students are very comfortable with technology, and many seem to feel that reading on a device is 'cooler.'" This creates more opportunities for students to read outside of school. Customization also drives accessibility. Students can adjust font style and size for easier reading. Some digital content even includes visual cues and word matching, audiobook options for expressive reading and titles in native tongues. Screen reading also provides privacy for students who may be reading below grade level. Reducing self-consciousness and fear of judgment empowers students to read appropriate texts while they build skills and stamina.

2. APPEAL TO DIGITAL NATIVES.

"Digital content builds on many students' love of technology by allowing them to incorporate technology into their reading," says David Saia, librarian at [Heim Middle School](#) in Williamsville, N.Y. "I recently surveyed our student body and nearly

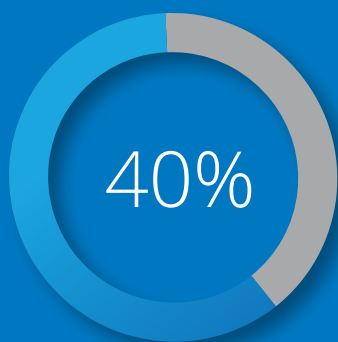
40% indicated that they preferred reading electronic text to print text."

3. DELIVER RELEVANT TITLES.

Nobody enjoys reading something they're not interested in. Digital libraries make it possible to guide students to appropriate high-interest texts in various formats: ebooks, audiobooks, Read-Alongs and graphic novels. "Students take ownership of understanding the piece and relating it to their own lives or to something else they are familiar with, which increases the personal relevance of what they read and also helps them to remember," says Bem, who was the first in her district to promote digital reading on a school-wide level.

4. PERSONALIZE YOUR INSTRUCTION.

Teachers can monitor how long and how often students are reading and make sure the books on their virtual shelves are sufficient for assignments and appropriate for their reading levels. Some platforms, like [OverDrive Education's Sora app](#), enable teachers to review students' notes and highlights using Google Classroom. "Looking at their notes, questions and vocabulary gaps informs instruction because it gives concrete data on what the student is struggling or engaging with," explains Patti Carlyle, K-12 specialist with OverDrive. "You can uncover the parts of a text that are compelling or problematic and design interventions to help the student engage more deeply with the material. And if there's overlap across multiple students, you can use that data to review with the whole class."



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TALES FROM THE REAL WORLD

Use these ideas to take advantage of digital texts or to inspire your own activities:

- **INTEGRATE WITH OTHER CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY.** “Teachers can use Sora on their smart boards and show the students different things they are looking for, then have students replicate the activity or reading skill in their own digital books and share it with the instructor,” Bem says. “Some of my teachers check out an audiobook on Sora then play it on Fridays for their classes. The students can’t wait until the next installment!”
- **MODEL THE HABITS OF A GOOD READER.** Sharing your own love of reading with students conveys skills and shows that reading is a lifelong hobby. “One strategy would be to model reading discovery, such as sharing favorite quotes or sections in stories with students and discuss why they are meaningful,” Saia says. “Students could be asked to share their own favorites, which they will probably be reluctant to do, but it will open them up to looking for places in stories where text is meaningful to them.”
- **MAKE IT A GAME.** “Plan a scavenger hunt of vocab words in the text,” Carlyle suggests. “Have groups or each student find the words, define them, then write a new sentence in a note. Export and share the results, then vote on the funniest or most creative sentence for each word.” Digital reading apps like Sora also challenge students to unlock achievement badges, creating additional motivation to read.
- **LET STUDENTS LEAD LEARNING.** “One of our teachers uses a ‘daily definer,’ a student whose job is to check the online dictionary in Sora and define words for the rest of the class,” Saia notes. “Students like the responsibility and enjoy using the technology in a way that is approved for class use.”

SORA IN ACTION

When accessibility, fun and personalization are incorporated, student success in reading has so much potential.

In one Maine district, **digital book checkouts skyrocketed 200%** when OverDrive’s Sora student reading app was introduced in August 2018.

This digital collection includes all three grade level bands - elementary, middle and high school.

In a California district, **checkouts have doubled** each month since Sora was rolled out. The unique users — or the individual students using ebooks — have doubled as well.



DEEP READING

WITH DIGITAL TEXTS

Daniel Willingham, a University of Virginia psychology professor and author, studies the brain science of reading. In an [op-ed for the New York Times](#), he states that students' understanding of text depends more on their background knowledge and vocabulary than actual reading skills and techniques.

When students read for knowledge acquisition, they are gathering valuable background and contextual information necessary to more deeply understand the text they're currently using and texts they'll read later. And digital texts make that easier. In fact, [a landmark study](#) of reading comprehension, digital texts and prior knowledge from the University of Rhode Island found that reading online has other benefits to support deep reading.

With screen reading, students have more opportunities to interact with text — highlighting, word look-up, links and, in some cases, audio and

video. And with digital content, they build critical thinking skills by deciding how to take advantage of additional resources embedded in the text, such as definitions and other supporting contextual information that sheds light on the story itself.

The easy access to more information creates a deeper understanding of what students are reading, which boosts background knowledge, encourages progress and instills a feeling of success. These factors combine to help students learn more from reading and get more enjoyment from it, too. ■





ABOUT SORA

OverDrive's Sora student reading app makes it easy to integrate ebooks and audiobooks into any district or school's reading program. Educators can discover all that **Sora has to offer with a 60-day free trial and access to 100+ juvenile and young adult titles.**

Sora enables instant access to a vast number of resources that suit every content area and any student's interest and reading ability, from the canon to best-selling and award-winning titles. The app also benefits teachers with real-time insights that support schools in their efforts to provide a more personalized reading experience for their students.

Want to learn more?
[Sign up for a free trial.](#)



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ABOUT OVERDRIVE

OverDrive Education is the leading global digital reading platform for K-12, offering the industry's largest catalog of ebooks, audiobooks and streaming video. As a 100% digital company serving 43,000 libraries and schools worldwide, OverDrive combines technology with content to support learning and reading in the classroom, library and home. With an easy-to-use central platform, students get the right titles at the right time, online or offline, on all major devices.

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