Have you ever had a student tell you that the material you are studying is “too hard”? While this comment may sometimes be an excuse for laziness, it may also be a red flag and a truthful commentary from students who have difficulty with comprehension. High school English teachers are typically content driven. We expect students to know how to read, and when they cannot complete their assignments, we are not always sure what to do for them. We do not see ourselves as reading teachers, and this is where we go wrong. In their second edition of Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement, Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis provide updated tools for teachers who need help fostering content-area literacy.

While I found the first edition of this book useful, the revamped edition is even better. The book is divided into four sections. Part I provides a research-based look at comprehension strategies. There is a new section on assessment that I found especially enlightening. In this section, the authors acknowledge that “in this era of No Child Left Behind, test preparation is becoming the default curriculum” (39). Harvey and Goudvis provide an important look at assessment and how it can inform instructional practices. Another excellent addition is the chapter titled “Tools for Active Literacy: The Nuts and Bolts of Comprehension Instruction” (44), which includes the description of explicit instructional strategies such as readalouds, think-alouds, and guided discussion. Step-by-step instructions, along with tips, are included in this section. From the novice teacher to the content-area expert, reviewing and incorporating these strategies into the high school classroom would be beneficial. Part II of the new edition is organized by reading strategies.

The authors focus on the importance of monitoring comprehension (78), which is something that students at the high school level have not always mastered. Part III, a new section, deals with content area reading—and makes this book a terrific resource not only for English teachers but for colleagues in science and social studies as well. Part IV is an updated section offering terrific resources for instruction.

Strategies That Work should be on every English teacher’s bookshelf. It is a reader-friendly text that will help all of us to further engage students in the learning process. The book is dense and packed with information and strategies, and while it will more than likely be purchased by primary and middle school teachers, those of us who teach high school should take the time to read it so that we can foster lifelong readers, as opposed to students who dutifully regurgitate meaningless facts to pass the test or earn good grades.